WORLD OF ECHO

NOISE AND KNOWING IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

Adin E. Lears

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For Karen Parker Lears and Jackson Lears
"Into þe he myrth of lufe"

Corpus adhuc Echo, non vox erat.
Up to this time, Echo was a body, not a voice alone.

—Ovid, *Metamorphoses* III. 359

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Abbreviations

CR	*Chaucer Review*
EETS	Early English Text Society
ELH	*English Literary History*
FZ	*Fasciculi Zizaniorum*
GL	*Grammatici Latini ex Recensione Henrici Keilii*
MED	*Middle English Dictionary*
MLR	*Modern Language Review*
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*
PL	*Patrologiae cursus completus: series Latina*
SAC	*Studies in the Age of Chaucer*
YLS	*Yearbook of Langland Studies*

Note on Transliteration

Many of the primary sources I draw from in this book use archaic English letters such as "thorn" (Þ, þ), "eth" (Ð, đ), "yogh" (Ȝ, ȝ), and "ash" (Æ, æ). In some, but not all cases, the critical editions and scholarly sources I use transliterate these to modern English "th" (for thorn and eth), "y" or "gh" (for yogh), and "ae" (for ash). My quotations simply follow directly from my sources, adopting transliterations and likewise leaving archaic letters in place when they do.

Introduction
Voice in Medieval Soundscapes

At some point in the early fifteenth century, a blank folio near the end of a monastic miscellany was partially filled with a cacophonic alliterative poem on the subject of blacksmiths and the noise of their vocation.[1] The anonymous poet complains about the smiths' disruptive din as they work in the forge at night. In the process, the poet highlights their base appearance along with their noise: "Swart smeked smeþes smateryd wyth smoke / dryue me to deth wyth den of here dints / Swech noys on nyghtes ne herd men neuer" (black-smoked smiths, smattered with smoke / drive me to death with the din of their blows / Such a noise at night men have never heard). These lines link a defiled soundscape with impure bodies: just as the smiths themselves are polluted with smoke, the quiet of night has been tainted with the din of their blows. Indeed, the smiths are "cammed

1. The thirteenth-century manuscript is London, British Library, MS Arundel 292. For a transcription and overview that locates the poem within its social and literary milieu, see Elizabeth Salter, "A Complaint against Blacksmiths," *Literature and History* 5, no. 2 (1979): 194–215. My dating of the poem and manuscript follows that of Kathryn Kerby-Fulton in "Major Middle English Poets and Manuscript Studies, 1300–1450," in *Opening Up Middle English Manuscripts: Literary and Visual Approaches*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Maidie Hilmo, and Linda Olson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 40–41.

kongons": "pug-nosed dwarves" or "simpletons."[2] Finally, their physical and mental malformations govern their inarticulate voices, which never amount to comprehensible human language. In a phrase that accentuates their animalistic irrationality, the poet tells us that the smiths "gnauen and gnacchen [and] gronys to gyder" (gnaw, gnash, and groan together). They express their exertion with reduplicative nonsense syllables: "Lus bus, las das, rowtyn be rowe" (Lus bus las das [they] roar in a row). Such sounds are "rowt[ing]," a verb often applied to the voices of animals.[3]

It is instructive to compare the "Complaint"-poet's annoyance—even moral outrage—at the smiths' noise with the clerical and popular reactions to another noisemaker living in roughly the same time and place. During the first few decades of the fifteenth century, the crying and wailing of Margery Kempe was provoking similar ire across East Anglia and beyond. The mystic, wife, and pilgrim was notorious among her countrymen and fellow pilgrims for her loud displays of religious devotion. In her autobiographical account of her mystical experiences, Kempe recalls the first time she is visited with wails and tears. Traveling to Calvary on pilgrimage, she has a vision of Christ's Passion:

> & sche had so gret compassyon & so gret peyn to se owyr Lordys peyn þat sche myt not kepe hir-self fro krying & roryng þow sche xuld a be ded þerfor. And þis was þe fyrst cry þat euyr sche cryed in any contemplacyon. And þis maner of crying enduryd many 3erys aftyr þis tyme for owt þat any man myt do, & þerfor sufferyd sche mych despite &

2. The adjective "cammed" referred to a turned-up nose that, according to one text on medieval physiognomy, "sygnyffyith lecchery." *MED*, s.v. "cammed," ed. Robert E. Lewis et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952–2001); online edition in Middle English Compendium, ed. Francis McSparran et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2000–2018), https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary. For the note on physiognomy, see John Metham, *The Works of John Metham Including the Romance of Amoryus and Cleopes*, ed. H. Craig (London: EETS, 1916), 134–35. The noun *kongon*, which is thought to stem from a French term for "changeling" (i.e., an undesirable child left by fairies in exchange for a stolen healthy one), was a general term of abuse, but also referred to a person with physical or mental disabilities: a dwarf or simpleton. See *OED*, s.v. "congeon," https://www.oed.com.

3. There are eight separate entries for the verb "routen" in the *MED*, several of which are tied to nonhuman vocalization. Here I am drawing from "routen" v. 1, meaning "to roar" or "bellow" and sometimes used as part of the phrase "routen and roren" (to bellow and roar) and used to translate the Latin *mugire* ("to bellow" or "moo") and applied to an ox or cow (*bos*). It is also worth noting that this line from the "Complaint" is used as an example of "routen" v. 4, "to strike . . . a blow or beat." I do not believe these two definitions are mutually exclusive. Indeed, the poet may be making poetic use of both sets of significance, and others. See *MED*, s.v. "routen" v.1 and v. 4, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary.

> mech reprefe. Þe cryeng was so lowed & so wondyrfyl þat it made þe pepyl astoynd les þan þei had herd it be-forn & er ellys þat þei knew þe cawse of þe crying.[4]

Moved by compassion for the suffering of Christ, Kempe erupts with "krying & roryng" in a raucous display of emotion. As the passage explains, she is visited with these fits many times after this experience, and they earned her much "reprefe" from others, who do not understand their cause or meaning.

While these two examples may seem somewhat distant from one another in context and genre—the first a satirical take on a particular profession, the second a spiritual autobiography—here I want to draw attention to their similarities. Both texts point to a preoccupation with noise and unsignified vocalization, showing how it was denounced as a corrupt and embodied form of expression associated with the laity. For the "Complaint"-poet, such lay expression is not only uncommunicative, but also nonhuman. As chapter 2 will show in greater detail, for many of the religious and literate authorities around Margery Kempe—and for many of her own countrymen—her crying and roaring was the confused expression of a woman who was too literal-minded in her focus on the bodily and the material. These examples show a range of ways that the expression of laypeople, all of whom were relatively unschooled in standard forms of literacy, was linked to noise and unsignified sound in late medieval England.

Both works highlight a dismissive and restrictive impulse toward lay expression. Yet both also show, somewhat counterintuitively, how medieval thinkers made use of a productive slippage between noise and literary making, even as they worried about its cognitive and social effects. Despite the fact that the "Complaint" targets what the poet perceives to be the disruptive and nonsensical noise of a class of "brutish" laymen, it cannot be denied that the poem itself depends on such noise for its own existence and aural innovation. Its hyperalliteration does not fit neatly into any other poetic tradition of the Middle Ages.[5] And despite his alarm at the noises of the forge, the "Complaint"-poet seems to revel in making his own noise, repeating nonsense syllables in what linguists would call reduplicative or echoic language

4. Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Sanford Meech and Hope Emily Allen (London: EETS, 1940), 68.

5. See Salter, "A Complaint against Blacksmiths," 204. At 203–6, Salter discusses how the "Complaint" confounds generic categories and suggests that it has more in common with "burlesque poems and prose pieces of the fifteenth century" as well as poetry like *Piers Plowman* that thematizes work, especially as a part of urban life, than it does with alliterative poetry of the West Midlands.

until it sprawls across nearly the full width of the folio: "tik tak hic hac tiket taket tyk tak lus bus las das, swych lyf þei ledyn" (what a life they lead). Ultimately, the "Complaint"-poet's hyperalliterative verse, full of echoic nonsense syllables, both parodies the noise of the blacksmiths and extends it as the basis of its own creation. Kempe's book too, I will argue in chapter 2, takes her clamorous voice as a foundation for its own rhetorical ornamentation, and the sounds that it produces.

In its largest sense, *World of Echo* attunes itself to noise and voice in order to probe how we have historically encountered difference, especially unknown or little-understood cognitive and emotional spaces. The "rowt[ing]" of the blacksmiths, Margery Kempe's "krying & roryng," and the noisemaking of many other figures—all show how the designation of noise has historically marked otherness and has been used to marginalize certain ways of being and knowing. Unsignified sound and utterance—wails, grunts, snores, and more—are an important focus of this book. But equally important are the ways that medieval texts present lay uses of language as noise: the "chirking" sounds of rumor, architecturally imagined by Geoffrey Chaucer as a spinning wicker house, for example, or the Wife of Bath's "jangling," which I examine in chapters 4 and 5, respectively. Throughout this book I am conceiving of noise broadly as an extrasemantic experience and expression of sound. This allows me to examine not only how medieval thinkers treat what we would today call noise—the jingling of a bridle or the rumbles of thunder—but also their keen interest in how signified sound, including and especially language, could be *experienced as noise*, outside of a precise or pointed meaning.

This immersive experience in sound unmoored from exact signification and the rebounding of ideas and associations that such experience produces is the world of echo I have in mind.[6] Medieval writers were familiar with Echo as a figure from classical mythology (though medieval treatments of the Ovidian account frequently attend more closely to Narcissus than they do to Echo). They also knew of the acoustic phenomenon that bore her name. In Middle English the word "echo" was used in three interrelated senses. It referred to the aural re-sounding that we still call the echo today. It was also a term for flattery, a form of "empty" speech or sound without substance that appealed to base personal pleasure. Finally, "echo" appeared as a personification of both of these senses of the word. In one way or another and to varying degrees, all of these uses emphasize the echo's

6. The phrase "World of Echo" is, in part, an homage to the 1986 experimental cello album by Arthur Russell, an allusion that purposely juxtaposes medieval and contemporary aesthetics in a way that puts pressure on distinctions between the medieval and the modern.

persistent association with immersive sensory experience and with the principle of repetition or response.

John Trevisa's Middle English translation of Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon* offers a salient example in a passage that recalls Chaucer's metaphorical comparison in *The House of Fame* between sound and ripples—both proceed with "Every sercle causynge other."[7] Trevisa translates Higden's description of the soundscape of Arcadia, a region of the central Peloponnese, noting "ȝif noyse of men oþer of trompes sowneþ in þe valley, þe stones answereþ euerech oþer, and diuerse ecco sowneþ. Ecco is þe reboundynge of noyse."[8] The passage describes an animated world of echo, here presented as a process of sounding and re-sounding. The noise of human instruments sets sounds "reboundynge" off the rocks and, in turn, "answer[ing]" one another. The echo's Middle English associations with sensory experience and response make their way both literally and metaphorically into other uses of the word, accompanied by both positive and negative connotations. In its sense of empty flattery, the response associated with the echo was narrowly associated with empty repetition, as when Lydgate refers to flattery as "Placebo [i.e., 'I will please'], / ffor sche kan maken an Eccho, / Answere euere agayn the same."[9]

Yet other uses present the responsive qualities of the echo in a more complex way, as in the striking example of Chaucer's Clerk's Tale. The story of patient Griselda and her tyrannical husband Walter is fundamentally concerned with the alignment of intention, word, and action. Walter demands that Griselda promise to obey him in everything before their marriage, then twice tests her by requesting that she give their children up to death. Griselda keeps her word, even when it requires this unbearable sacrifice. Over the course of the tale the Clerk repeatedly questions the purpose of Walter's draconian tests, noting, for example, that "yvele it sit / To assaye a wyf whan that it is no need, / And putten hire in angwyssh and in drede" (IV. 460–62). At the close of the tale, after praising Griselda's virtue—he notes that wives should follow Griselda, not in "humylitee" (IV. 1143) but in her "constan[ce]

7. *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 357, l. 796. All subsequent references to Chaucer's works will be cited in-text from this edition either by line number or, when necessary, book/fragment and line number, unless otherwise noted.

8. Ranulf Higden, *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden monachi Cestrensis together with the English Translations of John Trevisa and of an unknown writer of the fifteenth century*, ed. J. Rawson Lumby (London: Longman, 1865), 1:189.

9. Guillaume de Deguileville, *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man, Englisht by John Lydgate, A. D. 1426, from the French of Guillaume de Deguileville, A. D. 1330, 1355*, ed. F. J. Furnivall (London: EETS, 1899), 598.

in adversitee" (IV. 1146)—the Clerk ends with an address to "noble wyves" (IV. 1183), naming the Wife of Bath among them. In a passage usually identified as a satirical antifeminist song to close the Clerk's tale, a speaker (identified, alternately, as the Clerk or Chaucer) bids that wives "Lat non humylitee [their] tonge naille" (IV. 1184) and "Folweth Ekko, that holdeth no silence, / But evere answereth at the countretaille" (IV. 1189–90).[10] These lines frame wifely retort as hollow sound, empty of substance, and so undercut the Clerk's previous assertions that wives should not emulate Griselda's humility. There is, no doubt, an ironic edge to these lines. Yet, in the context of the Clerk's praise for the alignment of word and intention and his persistent condemnation of Walter's draconian tests, the lines are also suggestively sincere, implying that the echo's responsive qualities might offer a corrective to the tyrannical abuse of power.

This book uses the immersive and responsive properties of the echo as conceptually generative points of contact for examining how extrasemantic experience, which was often tied to listening in the texts I examine, produced forms of lay knowledge outside of established structures of power. In emphasizing these properties of the echo, I am influenced by the field of sound studies, especially Veit Erlmann's work on "resonance," which has amplified how the concept was a crucial principle for the production of knowledge in eighteenth-century Europe and beyond.[11] He turns, in part, to the ways early authors describe the mechanism of resonance: how vibrating strings on an instrument set other strings to vibrate in resonance when they are plucked or played. In doing so, he shows how the idea of resonance was closely tied to processes of association and sympathy and so was fundamentally tied to feelings—both sensation and emotion. Ultimately, Erlmann shows, hearing played a crucial role in the production of knowledge, making the Enlightenment also an "Ensoniment." In a range of scientific, philosophical, and literary work from the eighteenth century, sensory perception worked along with the faculty of reason, belying the dualist narrative of scientific progress—which posited a shift away from feeling toward reason—so often tied to the Enlightenment. Here I take Erlmann's emphasis on the associative and sympathetic properties of sound and apply it to language, asking how medieval thinkers made use of the sounds of

10. For a discussion of these lines as antifeminist song, see, for example, Elizabeth Scala, "Desire in the *Canterbury Tales*: Sovereignty and Mastery between the Wife and the Clerk," *SAC* 31 (2009): 81–108. For the contested speaker of these lines, see *Riverside Chaucer*, 883 n. 1177.

11. Veit Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality* (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

words—and their various resonances—using the feelings of language to get at a form of knowledge beyond language.

Toward a Lexicon of Noise

Given my capacious approach to the subject of noise, a brief discussion of the history of the word and related vocabulary is in order. The first attested English use of the word "noise" appears in the early thirteenth-century guide for anchoresses, the *Ancrene Wisse*. In a discussion of helpers of the "feont" or "fiend"—the devil's court—the author writes: "Þe prude beoð his bemeres. Draheð wind inward [of] worltlich hereword, ant eft wið idel ȝelp puffeð hit utward as þe bemeres doð. Makieð noise ant lud dream to schawin hare orhel" (Pride is his trumpeter. He draws wind of praiseful word inward and puffs it out with idle boasting, as trumpeters do, and makes noise and loud sound to show his pride).[12] This colorful passage about pride, which anticipates the "trompes" of fame and slander in Chaucer's *House of Fame*, is also fundamentally about incorrect ways of hearing and understanding language. Pride the trumpeter hears or draws in words of praise—words that are empty, amounting to little more than wind—then puffs them out again with sounds that are pleasant, but equally empty, here called "noise" for the first time. By linking the cognition and expression of prideful language to breathing in—not spirit but wind—the author points to the insubstantial nature of this process of understanding, as well as its grounding in the material world rather than a more substantive spiritual realm. It is significant that a marginal gloss introducing the section containing this passage in one manuscript reads "her beginneð þe feorðe dale al of temptaciuns fleschliche & gastliche vttere & inre" (here begins the fourth portion of all temptations fleshly and spiritual, outer and inner).[13] As we will see throughout this book, but especially in the first two chapters, the distinction between "outer" and "inner" sensation was crucial in theological theories of knowledge and sensory perception. The implied equivalence between "noise" and "drem," a Middle English word denoting din, but also "mirth" and "enjoyment" or "pleasure," locates noise in the realm of dangerous corporeal sensation, implying an imperfect or errant expression of knowledge.[14]

12. Bella Millett, ed., *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402, with Variants from Other Manuscripts*, 2 vols. (Oxford: EETS, 2005–6), 1:81.

13. Eric John Dobson, ed., *The English Text of the Ancrene riwle* (London: EETS, 1972), 135. See also London, British Library, MS Cotton Cleopatra C VI, fol. 74r.

14. See *MED*, s.v. "drem" n. 1, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary.

The concept—and sounds—of noise effervesce in a variety of other words as well, many of them identifiable as what contemporary linguists would call "echoic language" (also called onomatopoeia). These words or phrases imitate or echo a sound, such as "bumble" or "buzz," or reduplicate sounds in two different paired words (or nonsense syllables) that come together to form a new lexeme, for example, "chitchat" or "knickknack." Such words are formed through what linguists call "expressive" (as opposed to grammatical) morphology. They are created and used for playful and aesthetic effect, sometimes signaling emotional intimacy or love (as in baby talk, e.g., "kissy-kissy" or "tootsy-wootsy") and sometimes contempt (e.g., "fancy schmancy," "hoity-toity"), all subsumed under an overarching principle of informality.[15]

This informality speaks to an important semantic element of echoic language. Elisa Matiello notes, "reduplicatives tend to exhibit a certain semantic indeterminacy, since their meanings are often connected with vague concepts, namely indecision, confusion, carelessness, disorder, foolishness, etc."[16] Historically, echoic language often denotes disorder or chaos ("hodgepodge," "higgledy-piggledy," "willy-nilly"), wild uncivilization ("barbarian," "hubbub"), and empty artificiality ("artsy-fartsy," "knickknack"). These semantic associations also hold true in early usage. As we saw in the "Complaint against Blacksmiths," the reduplication of nonsense syllables like "tik tak hic hac" (and so on) is consistent with the poem's emphasis on the blacksmiths' uncivilized irrationality, their physical and moral pollution, and their voices as sound "out of place."[17] The phrase "bibble-babble" was commonly used during the sixteenth century to denote idle prating—speech that was considered empty and useless.[18]

The ancient languages—including Latin—that influenced scholars of the Middle Ages were full of echoic words. Indeed, Greek, Latin, and Arabic contained no umbrella term to denote noise, instead using words that referred to specific types of noises.[19] Often these words were echoic: *murmur* denoted a low rumble, for example, and *mugitus* signified the mooing or roaring of

15. For more on reduplicatives as echoic language, see Elisa Matiello, *Extra-Grammatical Morphology in English: Abbreviations, Blends, Reduplicatives, and Related Phenomena* (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2013), 141–68.

16. Matiello, *Extra-Grammatical Morphology in English*, 142–43.

17. In identifying noise as "sound out of place," I follow the anthropologist Mary Douglas's influential designation of dirt as "matter out of place." See Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1991).

18. *OED*, s.v. "bibble-babble," https://www.oed.com.

19. For further discussion, see Charles Burnett, "Perceiving Sound in the Middle Ages," in *Hearing History: A Reader*, ed. Mark M. Smith (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 70.

a particular animal. As chapters 1 and 3 will highlight, such Latin words were often used to distinguish between articulate language and inarticulate noise. The twinned disciplines of grammar and music, both of which were grounded in medieval theories of *vox*, used echoic noise words like *mugitus*, and others, to denote examples of the *vox confusa*.[20] Though grammarians debated how and to what extent such a voice could hold meaning, very often they deemed the *vox confusa* to be a voice without reason or intention—one that amounted to sound alone. Historically, echoic language has emerged to trivialize the habits, taste, and culture of persons or creatures whose cognitive and emotional abilities lie outside certain standards of rational subjectivity.[21]

Echo and Animacy

In critically examining the hierarchies of authority and value around noise, I am broadly influenced by posthumanist scholarship that seeks to decenter a focus on the rational mind as the seat of consciousness. My opening examples indicate how, in associating lay expression with noise and unsignified utterance, medieval thinkers commonly assigned lay speakers a lower order of being than that of a conventionally literate and male clerical authority. Indeed, as chapters 3 and 4 will show in greater detail, medieval theories of voice were largely oriented toward what contemporary linguists and cultural critics have called an "animacy hierarchy" in language: a way of ordering the natural and created world based on degrees of liveliness. According to this theory, an object or entity does not have to be alive in order to have animacy. But it must have qualities adjacent to or associated with the state of being alive—qualities such as sentience, movement, awareness, or intention—that are attributed to it linguistically. The phrase "the hikers that rocks crush" is an oft-cited example among linguistic theorists of animacy. By making

20. For more on medieval theories of *vox*, as well as the disciplinary overlap between grammar and music, which shared *vox* as a raw material, see Elizabeth Eva Leach, *Sung Birds: Music, Nature, and Poetry in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006) and Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: "Grammatica" and Literary Theory, 350–1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For an invaluable and well-annotated scholarly edition of primary sources in the arena of medieval grammar, see Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter, eds., *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300–1475* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). A useful scholarly collection of music theory and history is Oliver Strunk's *Source Readings in Music History from Classical Antiquity through the Romantic Era* (New York: Norton, 1950).

21. Echolalia—arguably a variation of echoic language—continues to be treated as a pathology in children with nonstandard cognition like autism. See, for example, Aaron Shield, Frances Cooley, and Richard P. Meier, "Sign Language and Echolalia in Deaf Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder," *Journal of Speech, Hearing, and Language Research* 60, no. 6 (2017): 1622–34.

"rocks" the subject that governs the verb "crush," the phrase shows how language can imbue objects generally perceived as inanimate with agency and animacy.[22] The linguist and cultural critic Mel Chen has productively explored the political and social implications of animacy by showing how it participates in a certain "political grammar . . . which conceptually arranges human life, disabled life, animal life, plant life, and forms of nonliving material in orders of value and priority."[23] This book, in part, offers a longer perspective on such an impulse, showing how the voice has historically been ordered on degrees of articulacy, which have in turn been tied to hierarchies of intelligence and animacy.

We can begin to see how such an animacy hierarchy might have been in play in the Middle Ages as we consider how medieval clerical authorities tended to characterize the speech of the laity in general as noise, especially when it came to voices of popular opinion or dissent. In perhaps the most widely read and discussed example of this, John Gower's visionary account of the revolt of 1381 compares the cries of the rebellious peasants to (among other noisemakers) the "roar of the sea" (maris . . . sonitus), to "the shrill voices of monsters" (monstrorum vocibus altis), and to a series of animal sounds, including moos (*mugitus*), grunts (*grunnitus*), and barks (*latratus*).[24] In Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, a crowd of folk assemble to demand that the Greeks return the prisoner of war Antenor in exchange for Criseyde. The Trojan prince Hector "sobrely" defends Criseyde, but "The noyse of peple up stirte thane at ones, / As breme as blase of strawe iset on-fire" (IV. 176–84). Their public outcry is juxtaposed with Hector's reasoned defense of Criseyde. Just as Gower's rebellious peasants are compared to the roaring of the sea, here the noise of the people is compared to wildfire, signaling its disorder and unchecked anger.

There is a value judgment in associating lay voices with noise. It is a dismissal of a form of understanding and literacy that is grounded in attention to the material world as much or more than to the ideas that the text conveys. Chaucer's Parson reinforces religious standards of articulate voice by condemning a variety of forms of prognostication, including divination by the

22. For a discussion of this phrase in relation to the concept of the "animacy hierarchy," see Mel Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 2–3.

23. Chen, *Animacies*, 13.

24. John Gower, *Poems on Contemporary Events: The Visio Anglie (1381), and Cronica Tripertita (1400)*, ed. David R. Carlson, trans. A. G. Rigg, 3 vols. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2011). See "maris . . . sonitus" (l. 722); "monstrorum vocibus altis" (l. 797); "mugitus" (l. 800); "grunnitus" (l. 801); "latratus" (l. 805).

sounds of animals and objects, asking "What seye we of hem that bileeuen on dyuynailes as by flight or by noyse of briddes or of beestes, or by sort, by nigromancie, by dremes, by chirkynge of dores or crakkyng of houses, by gnawing of rattes, and swich manere wrecchednesse?" (X. 605).[25] Similarly, the idea of noise was used to describe foreign languages and to emphasize the alterity of their speakers. John Trevisa's translation of Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon* comments on the inhabitants of Ethiopia with the observation, "Some diggeþ caues and dennes, and woneth vnder erþe and makiþ hir noyse wiþ grisbaytynge and chirkynge of teeþ more than wiþ voys of þe þrote."[26] Though this passage ostensibly describes the human inhabitants of Ethiopia, its description of subterranean dwellings and loud gnashing of teeth characterizes them as animals and magnifies their distance from literate, English standards of behavior and speech.

Experience, Aesthetics, and the "Babble" of Poetry

To be sure, such characterizations of human speech as noise show an effort to silence voices of dissent and to reinforce a standard of literate articulacy over those without access to that literacy. For many among the clerical elite, a body that experiences language as noise in turn produces noise. But this book also argues that expression that was characterized as inarticulate noise was tied to lay forms of knowledge and literacy in ways that authors in late medieval England took seriously and sometimes embraced. Richard Rolle and Kempe, William Langland, and Chaucer, all turn in part to lay modes of discourse—clamor, lament, babbling, gossip, and more—in order to explore a form of experiential lay literacy that was keenly attuned to the sensory and affective power of language as much as its semantic content. This literacy allowed for a production of knowledge based in resonance: in a semantic play of possible meanings and associations.

In this way *World of Echo* ties noise to the idea of experience as a way of knowing in late medieval England. Experience, especially as it relates to literary form, is currently animating medieval literary study. Up to this point I have emphasized how medieval thinkers understood noise as the

25. Not all invocations of animal noise dismissed its ability to communicate. In his late fourteenth-century Middle English translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus's thirteenth-century encyclopedia *De proprietatibus rerum*, John Trevisa describes the booming call of the elephant, noting that "By his noyse and cryinge comeþ sodeynliche many ȝonge elephants." See Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum, a Critical Text*, ed. M. C. Seymour (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975–88), 2:1196.

26. Higden, *Polychronicon*, 1:159.

extrasemantic perception and/or expression of sound. Given this argument it may seem counterintuitive to approach the subject of noise from the perspective of literary form. Yet because one person's poetry was another's noise (and vice versa) it is still possible to discuss how formal elements produced, to varying degrees, an experience of language as noise. As Eleanor Johnson reminds us, issues of the aesthetic are tied quite fundamentally to the history of the senses. Johnson helpfully defines "aesthetic" in an etymological sense as "that which is perceptible to the senses, and by extension . . . the literary devices, forms, topoi, tropes, and styles by which a work engages with a reader's sense perceptions."[27] In chapter 4, for example, I draw attention to how Chaucer exploits the incantatory cadences of octosyllabic couplets, a verse form associated with orality and French vernacular literature. In doing so, Chaucer engages in a larger discussion about lay literacy as an immersive experience in the sounds of language.

I am not the first scholar to note the ways that literary forms facilitate an experience of language as noise, to greater or lesser degrees. In 1957, Northrop Frye famously referred to the "babble" and "doodle" of the lyric, a genre known for the ways it facilitates poetic thinking based on associative and largely preconscious (or "subconscious," as Frye asserts, following Freud) cognition. Frye charts a geography of the lyric, placing music at one boundary, image at the other, and in the center "cantillation": an emphasis on words for their material qualities rather than their meaning. Frye's "babble" is the radical or most extreme form of lyrical *melos*: the musical qualities of lyric. For Frye, "babble" works in the same way as a charm, through "hypnotic incantation that, through its pulsing dance rhythm, appeals to involuntary physical response."[28] As my first chapter will explore, the mid-fourteenth-century hermit and mystic Richard Rolle was keenly interested in *melos* and related terms for song, linking them, not to babble, but instead to *tinnitum* or "ringing." Though "babble" and "ringing" would seem to be entirely different kinds of sounds, I argue that both terms imply an extrasemantic experience of language, despite their differences in context, purpose, and genre. Indeed, medieval thinkers were deeply aware of a mode of reading for Frye's "babble" and that vernacular authors at the end

27. Eleanor Johnson, *Practicing Medieval Literary Theory: Ethics and the Mixed Form in Chaucer, Gower, Usk, and Hoccleve* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 3. Though the word "aesthetic" (borrowed from a German lexical item) did not emerge in English until the eighteenth century, its etymology ultimately stems from an ancient Greek word meaning "of or related to sensory perception." See *OED*, s.v. "aesthetic," https://www.oed.com.

28. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 276–78, quotation at 278.

of the fourteenth century and into the fifteenth embraced such babble as a form of lay literacy based on somatic and affective attachments.

As a poetic form associated with incantation and charm, the lyric lends itself to an examination of how poetry, and poetic language more broadly, can be experienced as noise. This book shows how dwelling in such a bodily experience of language, which lies outside of exact signification or precise comprehension, can offer ways out of the conceptual and social hierarchies that sometimes structure rational thought and semantically oriented communication. To express and to experience language as noise—that is, in a visceral and emotional way—is still to communicate. Indeed, the extrasemantic aspects of language can sometimes communicate more richly and deeply than semantic expression because they work through such experience.

In exploring how literary language facilitates different forms of experience, it is useful to turn to the ideas of performance and practice. As Ingrid Nelson has outlined, to speak of a "lyric" in the Middle Ages is to apply a modern genre to a literary culture, and its makings, that did not know or use the term.[29] To address this problem, Nelson identifies medieval lyric with practice instead of form, indicating how a variety of poetic and linguistic structures facilitated tactics of textual engagement among the laity that did not necessarily obey sanctioned power structures or modes of reading. This emphasis on practice as an element of the experience of poetic form has been an important component of recent efforts to unite the study of literary form with historically and contextually sensitive reading, enabling a more socially engaged treatment of literature and poetics.[30] It is one of the priorities of this book to extend such work. Here I highlight the deep history of cultural anxieties and social hierarchies that coalesce around the bodily and affective epistemologies of aesthetic experience. Further, I sketch how

29. Ingrid Nelson, *Lyric Tactics: Lyric, Genre, and Practice in Later Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017). For a discussion of the medieval uses of "lyric" and related words in Latin and vernacular languages, as well as the historiographic complications of applying the term to medieval literature, see 18–26.

30. For a useful overview of the history of formalism, which includes some discussion of the tensions between formalist and historicist reading, see Johnson, *Practicing Medieval Literary Theory*, 12–15. As her title suggests, Johnson, like Nelson, is interested in "practice" as a key term for the experiential knowledge produced by literary interpretation. Seeta Chaganti's book on dance also underscores the importance of understanding literary form in relation to bodily experience, indicating how dance both responded to and shaped poetic form in the Middle Ages. See Chaganti, *Strange Footing: Poetic Form and Dance in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018). Among nonmedievalists, Jonathan Culler has stressed rhythm and sound patterning as the "ritualistic" aspects of the lyric in a way that chimes with interest among medievalists in practice as a form of experiential and performative knowledge. See Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 8.

the concept of noise encompassed lay experiences of language that resisted authoritative epistemologies.

In doing so, it is crucial to mark and interrogate the ways that the semantic and somatic facets of language have historically been held to be separate, with the semantic as the privileged element that other aspects must uphold. When Augustine frets that the liturgical audience must subordinate their ears to reason as they listen to the psalms and remain focused on the words rather than the song, his impulse is similar to Alexander Pope's famous advice to writers in *An Essay on Criticism*: "the sound must seem an echo to the sense."[31] Between 1906 and 1911, the linguist Ferdinand Saussure showed the interdependence of semantic and somatic elements in his influential *Course in General Linguistics*.[32] Yet traces of such hierarchical and binary thinking remain. As Jonathan Culler's work on the lyric attests, the study of prosody, for example, shows a persistent focus on meter only when it directly affects the sense of the poem. Culler offers an important corrective to this, seeking to amplify the bodily experience of lyric poetry—that which is produced through rhythm, repetition, and sound patterning—for its own sake, "as independent elements that need not be subordinated to meaning *and whose significance may even lie in a resistance to semantic recuperation*."[33] Culler's invocation of "significance" is telling: it gestures to the myriad ways that language has meaning beyond the semantic content of the word. *World of Echo* sketches a deep history of reading for "significance" rather than signification, for meaningfulness rather than meaning.

By linking this extrasemantic element of reading to noise—as medieval texts invite us to do—I am complicating scholarly treatments of literary form that link it to harmony, structure, and order. As Seeta Chaganti has highlighted in her account of the experiential epistemologies generated by the interplay of medieval dance and poetic form, "poetry produce[s] not only harmony, but arrhythmia, disorientation, and strangeness."[34] In reading for such strange significance, we must turn, at least in part, to the pleasurable sensory experience of language. It is in this emphasis on pleasure—especially a pleasure taken outside of sanctioned structures of thought and productions of knowledge—that this book intersects with work in gender and sexuality

31. Alexander Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, ed. Alfred S. West (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908), 72.

32. Ferdinand Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin, ed. Perry Meisel and Haun Saussy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

33. Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 8 (emphasis added).

34. Chaganti, *Strange Footing*, 3.

studies. Carolyn Dinshaw has described the queer historical impulse of "living with" the text: that is, allowing emotional and erotic attachments to historical and literary figures to shape individual and social identity in ways that are dynamic and cooperative rather than rigidly hierarchical.[35] *World of Echo* partially historicizes this impulse by showing how such embodied engagement and expression was often configured as "feminine," a category based largely in a designation as not-male, or more broadly nonstandard. This logic of "A" versus "not-A" leads quite intuitively into the domain of the queer in its proposed etymological sense from the German *quer*: "transverse, oblique, crosswise."[36] Those bodies, practices, and literacies that did not meet conventional standards of intellectual authority held primarily among men were a deviation or turn from an original or standard. This book identifies the power play around language and literature that emerged from a clerical culture largely produced and maintained by men, one that often framed learning as a didactic transfer of information: a utilitarian exchange in which an authoritative speaker deposited discrete points of knowledge in his audience. Yet, emerging alongside this pedagogical and communicative model was a structure of feeling that resisted such forceful imposition of power from one speaker to another.[37] Though I would hesitate to designate this move as a "program" or "movement"—such terminology is far too systematic to really be accurate—this book nevertheless amplifies a persistent impulse to elevate these experiential lay epistemologies as alternate forms of expression that foregrounded emotion and sensation, resisting an oppressive logic of authoritative linguistic and literary forms.

Noise, Soundplay, and Semantic Fullness

In my emphasis on a material relationship to language, I am indebted to the work of feminist poststructuralists like Hélène Cixous, who emphasizes how a playful and material approach to language can circumvent the hierarchical power dynamics embedded in it. In her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous critiques the psychoanalytic logic of sexual difference articulated by Sigmund Freud and then expanded by Jacques Lacan and others. For Cixous,

35. Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities Pre- and Post-Modern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

36. *OED*, s.v. "queer" adj. 1, https://www.oed.com.

37. As I will discuss more fully in my second chapter, in making distinctions between these forms of experience and expression, I am guided by feminist thinkers like Hélène Cixous. See especially Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976): 875–93.

Freud and Lacan's theories persistently defined women—and femininity—in terms of lack. Cixous shows how this exclusionary logic of sexual difference inheres in what she calls "phallocentric language": a language of mastery that effaces difference by assuming the supremacy of one perspective. For Cixous, phallocentric language not only manifests itself socially or interpersonally; it also manifests itself semiotically as language that emphasizes the signified over the signifier: a dogmatic communication of singular meaning over semantic play.

To combat the mastery Cixous associates with phallocentric language, she calls for a different relationship to language:

> If woman has always functioned "within" the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds, it is time for her to dislocate this "within," to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of.[38]

For Cixous, a hierarchical logic of sexual difference pervades all language, and also governs the social relationships that exist through language. Just as the concept of "woman" has existed to define "man," phallocentric discourse has established itself as a standard against which other forms of discourse with "very different sounds" must stand. As Cixous's vocabulary of mastication here makes clear, the solution is to carve out or "bit[e]" away a new relationship to language that is emphatically located in the body. When we read the "tongue" in question in a metonymic sense as a language or means of communication, her description of "biting that tongue with her very own teeth" evokes renegotiating a relationship to language that is bodily and material. At the same time, when we read "tongue" literally as an organ of articulation, the passage embraces inarticulacy: a bitten tongue is only capable of partial enunciation. Yet, Cixous does not frame such expression as a disability, but instead emphasizes its possibility for empowerment.

The emancipating potential of Cixous's *écriture féminine* is based in a logic of fullness and all-ness more than lack. As such, it is not solely reserved for women. Cixous emphasizes that her aim is not to replace masculine supremacy with feminine control, but to embrace both: "I do desire the other for the other, whole and entire, male or female; because living means wanting

38. Cixous, "Laugh of the Medusa," 887.

everything that is, everything that lives, and wanting it alive. Castration? Let others toy with it. What's a desire originating from a lack? A pretty meager desire."[39] Cixous's *écriture féminine* is a form of expression that revels in the textures and sounds of language and in the plenitude of meaning that such experience generates. Indeed, her own writing in this essay works to enact the "very different sounds" of feminine writing with neologisms and homophonic wordplay. She puns with some frequency, for example on the verb *voler*—"to fly" and "to steal":

> Flying is woman's gesture—flying in language and making it fly. We have all learned the art of flying and its numerous techniques; for centuries we've been able to possess anything only by flying; we've lived in flight, stealing away, finding, when desired, narrow passageways, hidden crossovers. It's no accident that *voler* has a double meaning, that it plays on each of them and thus throws off the agents of sense.[40]

To write in *écriture féminine* is to buck a tradition that privileges "sense" or the direct communication of meaning. With their play of sounds and meanings, puns destabilize such singular or transparent communication by reveling in the sounds of language. In this way, puns enact what Cixous calls "the wonder of being several": a relationship to language—and to its speakers—founded in an embrace of fullness rather than the scrutiny of lack.[41]

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39. Cixous, "Laugh of the Medusa," 891.

40. Cixous, "Laugh of the Medusa," 887.

41. Cixous, "Laugh of the Medusa," 889. Shortly after Cixous's "Laugh of the Medusa" was translated into English, Roland Barthes took up similar ideas on language and power in a lecture on silence, delivered as part of a series of essays on the concept of "the Neutral" (le neutre) at the Collège de France 1977–78. Barthes treats silence as one of twenty-three embodiments—what he calls "figures" or "twinklings"—of "the Neutral." In this lecture, Barthes notes that speech is inherently about power: "the exercise of speech is tied to the problem of power: it's the theme of the right to speech" (22). Silence responds to this power dynamic; it is a "tactic to outplay (*dejouet*) oppressions, intimidations, the dangers of speaking" (23). Here, and throughout his lectures on the Neutral, Barthes uses "outplay" to denote the process by which his figures of the Neutral circumvent binary opposition and the power dynamics that inhere therein. For Barthes, silence is not an absence of meaning, but it does not communicate straightforwardly or transparently. Barthes goes on to suggest that language can operate as a form of silence. He notes "in the end we could say that 'chatter' (*bavardage*) being a discourse of pure contingency, is a form of silence in that it outplays words (this should be said carefully because chatterboxes are bores)" (26). As a form of "empty" language, *bavardage* amounts to sound alone; it shares with silence not an absence of sound, but instead a way of bypassing the dogmatism that Barthes understands to be inherent in speech. Silence and chatter both "outplay" dogmatic speech with a plenitude of possible meanings. By juxtaposing silence with chatter, Barthes gestures to the conceptual proximity of noise and silence as extrasemantic sonic experiences that multiply meaning at a latent level. See Roland Barthes, *The Neutral: Lecture Course at the Collège de France (1977–78)*, trans. Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

Cixous's argument responds (though not in a way she acknowledges directly) to a long-standing suspicion of puns among literary critics. For the influential scholar and early proponent of New Criticism William Empson, puns facilitate certain modes of reading and thinking in which words are "allowed to echo about in the mind."[42] To some extent, Empson's prolonged attention to puns recalls Augustine's discussion of the pleasures of liturgical song, which I discuss at greater length in chapter 1. Like Augustine, Empson struggles to come to terms with the obvious pleasure that he takes in the slippery sounds of language. Unlike Augustine, however, Empson ultimately dismisses these sounds, associating modes of writing and reading grounded in homophonic wordplay with nonrational femininity. He laments William Shakespeare's tendency toward punning (largely drawn, Empson suggests, from Chaucer) as a "less reputable" quality, writing that "it shows lack of decision and will-power, a feminine pleasure in yielding to the mesmerism of language, in getting one's way, if at all, by deceit and flattery, for a poet to be so fearfully susceptible to puns."[43] Cixous's argument in "The Laugh of the Medusa" challenges the remarkably persistent stance, evident in the writing of critics like Empson, that pleasure is a lie: a domain of deceit.

In her emphasis on finding truth in pleasure, Cixous's argument chimes with the work of Amy Hollywood, who has called for the place of ineffable joy in scholarly critique. Interrogating the critical emphasis on unspeakable trauma as a locus of the real and the true, Hollywood asks, "What if the inarticulateness of joy also marks something real? . . . And how might it offer new ways to think about the movement from the real to the true, or the varieties of ways in which truth might manifest itself?"[44] To illustrate the importance of mystical joy, Hollywood turns to a passage from the life of the twelfth-century mystic Christina the Astonishing, which "depicts sounds coming from Christina's body in a way that is rooted in the exuberance and order of song, although not reducible to it."[45] *World of Echo* turns its emphasis explicitly to the ways that knowledge of the unspeakable is not only grounded in trauma and pain, but also in pleasure. The clamor of Richard Rolle and Margery Kempe, which was grounded in notions of spiritual *iocunditas* for

42. William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York: New Directions, 1966), 63.

43. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 87. Empson's ambivalent discussion of puns spans much of this chapter, especially 63–88.

44. Amy Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 47. For a useful treatment of the influence of medieval thought on "the unspeakable" in contemporary literary theory, see Victoria Blud, *The Unspeakable: Gender and Sexuality in Medieval Literature, 1000–1400* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017).

45. Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia*, 60.

Rolle and in mirth and "good game" for Kempe, belong in the same intellectual and experiential tradition as Christina's song. So too does Langland's "lolling" language, as well as the creaks and whooshings of Chaucer's whirling House of Rumor and the exuberant jangling of his Wife of Bath.

It is Cixous's orientation toward fullness and all-ness that leads me to read her call for *écriture féminine* as a call for "feminine writing" rather than "women's writing." As this book will show, this distinction does not depend on biological sex but instead on a certain style or orientation toward language, one that does not privilege concept over feeling and so may not conform to standards of literate expression. This book shows how medieval thinkers were keenly aware of the ways that a dogmatic orientation toward meaning reinforces imbalances of power, most notably between cleric and layperson. Such power relationships were often understood in terms of gendered reading. As chapter 5 in particular will show, to read or listen for sounds over doctrine was to read in a feminine way, whether it was undertaken by women or not. In making this argument I hope to show how medievalists can and should broaden discussions of "women's writing" to examine how somatic engagement with language has historically been understood in terms of femininity and applied to lay listeners, speakers, and writers. I will also show how those laypeople took up this nonstandard relationship to language as a subtle way of resisting hierarchical power dynamics imposed through language.[46]

Many medieval authors, even those among the laity I examine in this book, inherit long-standing anxieties about the ways that the sounds and feelings of language can amplify its meanings, and so lead to obscurity. Yet in a fundamental way, authors including Rolle, Kempe, Langland, and Chaucer—like Cixous—also insist that sensory experience and body-based approaches to language and interpretation do not corrupt or obscure meaning, but instead provide more and better insights, ultimately leading, perhaps unexpectedly, to greater clarity. Indeed, Cristina Maria Cervone has highlighted how clarity was linked to "fullness" in Middle English conceptions of "pleyne" language, a word "whose plenitude (from the same Latin root) is replete with abundance."[47] Cervone refers to this fullness of meaning as "supereffable," an effusive orientation toward language that responds to the ineffability of

46. The influential anthology *The Idea of the Vernacular* addresses how medieval women readers operated in a way that was resistant to clerical control. My argument expands this to address the laity more broadly. See Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al., eds., *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280–1520* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), 114–15.

47. Cristina Maria Cervone, *Poetics of the Incarnation: Middle English Writing and the Leap of Love* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 9.

theological concepts like the incarnation.[48] To my mind, Cervone's neologism uses the prefix "super" both in its sense of "transcendence" (i.e., the state of being above or beyond) and as "excess." The term "supereffable," then, yokes together both desire and surplus, implying that cognitive and semantic excess is the best or only way to address that which resists understanding or articulation. This book shows how the idea of noise was one way that medieval thinkers turned to the supereffable and examines the social and cultural contexts of this turn.

Affect, Echo, and the Visionary

I locate an impulse to experience and express language as noise in relation to the shifts in lay religiosity across Europe that cultivated a more direct access to spiritual knowledge, without the mediation of clerical authority. Such lay religiosity was grounded in the practice of what scholars have often called "affective piety": forms of religious devotion based in sensory and emotional experience.[49] While vision and seeing have been privileged categories of analysis for scholars examining such shifts, *World of Echo* shows the fundamental role played by listening in the culture of affective lay piety that flourished in late fourteenth-century England.[50]

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48. Cervone, *Poetics of the Incarnation*, 10.

49. The foundational work on this topic is by Caroline Walker Bynum; see especially *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) and her earlier book, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). For a more recent book-length study, which situates affective piety in relation to the development of the idea of compassion, see Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

50. See, for example, Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998). The role of sound and hearing in medieval religiosity—both lay and institutional—is not an entirely new topic. I have found studies of monastic silence to be particularly fruitful in contextualizing the intellectual background of the late medieval authors I examine. See, for example, Paul F. Gehl, "*Competens Silentium*: Varieties of Monastic Silence in the Medieval West," *Viator* 18 (1987): 125–60, or more recently, Scott G. Bruce's book-length study *Silence and Sign Language in Medieval Monasticism: The Cluniac Tradition, c. 900–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). The work of scholars like Andrew Albin, who has called attention to the place of musical culture in late medieval religiosity, has also been fruitful in my thinking on the importance of the ear in medieval religious culture. See Albin, "Listening for *Canor* in Richard Rolle's *Melos Amoris*," in *Voice and Voicelessness in Medieval Europe*, ed. Irit Ruth Kleiman (New York: Palgrave, 2015), 177–97, and "The Prioress's Tale, Sonorous and Silent," *CR* 48, no.1 (2013): 91–112, and "Sound Matters," *Speculum* 91, no. 4 (2016): 998–1039. These treatments of sound have not, however, taken note of the importance of noise, nor have they explored the ways that the theories of knowledge embedded in lay religiosity made their way into more secular contexts.

Scholars working within the discipline of sound studies have examined the social, cultural, and intellectual history of sound and listening, often with the theoretical scaffolding of poststructuralist treatments of language and the voice.[51] These theoretically engaged histories of sound have called attention to the ways that tautological historical narratives pitting the "Dark Ages" against the "Enlightenment" have long given preeminent pride of place to vision as a marker for knowledge and understanding. We may consider, for example, how many modern idioms equate "seeing" with "knowing," beginning with the expression "I see" to indicate comprehension.[52] Yet a persistently presentist focus within sound studies often uncritically entwines sound's history with narratives of modernization, centered on the rise of sound-related technologies that flourished from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century.[53] *World of Echo* shows how the hierarchical

51. Important cultural and social histories of sound include, on the ancient soundscape, Shane Butler, *The Ancient Phonograph* (New York: Zone Books, 2015); on early modern England, Bruce Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); on modern Europe, Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance* and Alain Corbin, *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the 19th C. French Countryside*, trans. Martin Thom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); on early America, Richard Cullen Rath, *How Early America Sounded* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003) and Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); on American modernism, Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1933* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

52. In preparing this book manuscript I have had to moderate my use of terms such as "highlight," "underscore," and "align," all of which are taken from typesetting and advance visual paradigms for understanding. In their place I use terms such as "amplify," "stress," and "accentuate," which play up the auditory and the performative aspects of language and poetics.

53. See, for example, R. Murray Schafer's narrative of industrialization and noise pollution in *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1993). See also Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003) and Thompson, *Soundscape of Modernity*, especially chap. 4, "Noise and Modern Culture: 1900–1933." See especially edited volumes including Veit Erlmann, ed., *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening, and Modernity* (Oxford: Berg, 2004) and Michael Bull and Les Black, eds., *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2003). Other volumes make more of a gesture to include the Middle Ages within cultural histories of sound. See especially Smith, *Hearing History*. Early modernists have made important contributions to the field of sound studies, pioneering useful, "archaeological" methodologies and opening fruitful areas of inquiry. See especially Smith, *Acoustic World of Early Modern England* and Penelope Gouk, *Music, Science, and Natural Magic in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). See also Bruce Smith, "Listening to the Wild Blue Yonder," in Erlmann, *Hearing Cultures*, 21–41, and Penelope Gouk, "Raising Spirits, Restoring Souls: Early Modern Medical Explanations for Music's Effects," in Erlmann, *Hearing Cultures*, 87–105. The work of other early modernists also intersects with sound studies in ways that their authors do not necessarily acknowledge. See especially Carla Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance: Language Trouble in an Age of Eloquence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). Butler's book on ancient Latin literature, *The Ancient Phonograph*, is rich with potential applications to medieval language and literature and has been an important corrective to the presentist impulse in sound studies. Among medievalists, scholars like Andrew Albin have begun to make productive forays into

taxonomies of perception that informed these narratives were nascent but not fully formed in medieval Europe.

In fact, both vision and hearing were esteemed as important means of acquiring "true" spiritual knowledge over the more "base" senses of smell, taste, and especially touch. The esteem for hearing was based in part on biblical precedent. Paul's dictum in Romans 10:17 that "faith . . . cometh by hearing" (fides ex auditu) reinforced social hierarchies by advocating that the laity listen to established ecclesiastical authority. The biblical account of Pentecost translated the divine inspiration so often associated with visionary experience into an auditory and tactile event in which the apostles perceive the holy spirit as an amalgam of noise and flame. Biblical accounts such as these informed later didactic literature, which aimed to outline sensory hierarchies and prescribe strategies for their discipline. The Old French poem *Pelérinage de la vie humaine*, translated into Middle English by John Lydgate in the early fifteenth century, places the ear at the pinnacle of all of the body's sensory "gates," asserting that it is the organ most adept at perceiving divine truth, and so makes up for the dangerous deficiencies of the other "wyttys."[54]

Yet medieval taxonomies of the senses undermine the very hierarchies that they attempted to establish by accentuating the physical and tactile materiality of sound. Indeed, the felt qualities of sound would eventually contribute to its associations with a knowledge more immediate and visceral than the supposedly more detached and rational understanding offered by vision.[55] A synaesthetic play of the senses—what David Howes calls "intersensoriality"—is evident across an array of medieval texts.[56] As we will see in the fourth chapter's treatment of *The House of Fame*, Chaucer's Dreamer finds it increasingly difficult to isolate seeing from listening and other forms of feeling. Religious authors write of the mellifluous or "honeyed" flavor of God's word, implying that its sound also has a taste. Hearing was nearly inextricable from touch, the "basest" of all senses. Medieval thinkers repeatedly

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sound studies. See, for example, the cluster, "Sound Matters" in *Speculum*, with short essays by Albin as well as Susan Boynton, Sarah Kay, and Alison Cornish.

54. De Deguileville, *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, 138–40.

55. Jonathan Sterne names this critical commonplace as one point in what he calls an "audiovisual litany." See Sterne, ed., *The Sound Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2012) 9–10.

56. David Howes, introduction to *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, ed. David Howes (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 7. Medievalists have begun to explore such intersensoriality. Beth Williamson, for example, shows how shifts in register between vision and hearing—when music is experienced in a realm beyond the aural and when images are perceived in a realm beyond the visible—facilitate the use of "inner senses," including "the mind's ear." Beth Williamson, "Sensory Experience in Medieval Devotion: Sound and Vision, Invisibility and Silence," *Speculum* 88, no. 1 (2013): 1–43.

emphasize the physical, tactile effects, both violent and soft, that certain words or types of discourse had on the bodies of their auditors. The sound of language had the ability to strike a physical blow, as the Middle English word *clap*, meaning both a loud noise and a stroke of the arm or palm, makes clear.[57] The Middle English verb *blaundishen*, related to Modern English "blandishment," ultimately derives from the Latin *blandire*, "to caress" or "coax." This nexus of cognates attests to the way touch remains implicated in the sound of certain kinds of language. In the Middle Ages, such verbal fondling was frequently linked to dangerous flattery and seduction, often by women in an attempt to charm or ensnare men. As I will discuss more fully in chapter 5, Valerius, the narrator of Walter Map's thirteenth-century Latin *Dissuasio Valerii ad Rufinus* (an important source for Chaucer's Wife of Bath) chides his friend Rufinus for his susceptibility to female flattery, comparing it to the spells of the mythological witch Circe and the song of the Sirens.[58]

While an interest in the interaction of sound and sense is evident at least as early as Augustine, this book argues that concerns with the sound of language emerged in the form of poetic soundplay (punning, assonance, hyperalliteration, and more) in the period from ca. 1350–1440, at the same time vernacular theology and affective piety was flourishing in England. The interest in soundplay that was effervescing in late medieval England also had specific stakes: it amplified the cognitive importance of feeling in conjunction with reason and was a means for the laity—including lay women—to cultivate embodied forms of knowledge on their own terms, outside of existing clerical models of instruction.

These perspectives on sound, lay knowledge, and bodily intelligence do not occur only in religious or devotional contexts. Indeed, my archive spans authors and texts—Chaucer's *House of Fame* (chapter 4) and Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale (chapter 5)—that are often considered to be more secular and literary than those that medievalists and literary historians usually designate as devotional and/or mystical. My first two chapters on Rolle and Kempe, who are chronologically first and last of my four authors, serve as historical frames or bookends for the remaining chapters on Langland and Chaucer in order to emphasize how lay religiosity both informs and is

57. See *MED*, s.v. "clap(pe)," https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary.

58. "Gnatones diligis et comedas, qui dulces presusurrant illecebras, et precipue Circen, que tibi suspire[t]e suavitatis aromate gaudia plena perfundet, ut fallaris." See Walter Map, *Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves*, ed. Ralph Hanna and Traugott Lawler (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 1:123.

informed by more self-consciously literary texts. Overemphasizing the difference between religious and secular textual environments reinforces the very distinctions between medieval and modern that medievalists have long been working to dismantle. *World of Echo* shows how the practices and modes of textual attunement that produced knowledge in secular and devotional contexts were in dynamic interplay. In this way, secular modernity is intimately bound—indeed, inextricable from—medieval religiosity.

World of Echo is organized by genre, tracing an epistemological shift from the textual production of authors identified with and/or invested in the spiritual edification of the laity, including Richard Rolle, Margery Kempe, and William Langland, into Chaucer's more courtly and secular domain. The first two chapters examine the role of noise in the perception and expression of Rolle and Kempe, both controversial in their own time (to varying degrees) for the radical physicality of their devotional practice. In his *Incendium Amoris*, the mid-fourteenth-century mystic Richard Rolle, who is long acknowledged as an influential figure in the growth of affective piety in England, develops a form of what I call echoic mysticism, in which the mystic both perceives heavenly *canor* or song as noise (*tinnitum*) and echoes it back, again as noise (*clamor*, chapter 1). While he was never officially ordained, Rolle nevertheless operated as a spiritual advisor for several nuns at monasteries in Hampole and Yedingham. His pastoral writing in English offers instructions for female religious in developing their own form of echoic mysticism, translating a Latinate notion of mystical *clamor* to the English refrain "sobbing and sighing," which appears in several vernacular lyrics attributed to Rolle. After Rolle's death, Margery Kempe, whose *Book* acknowledges familiarity with his *Incendium*, adapts echoic mysticism into her own idiom (chapter 2) and combines it with the biblical model of Pentecost. Perceiving the Holy Spirit as a series of rough sounds, Margery allows her own cries and wails—an enactment of Rolle's "sobbing and sighing"—to echo back in her own performance of vernacular preaching. Margery's clamor is reproduced in the echoic style of her *Book*, whose manuscript and early print history highlights a tension between the affective and impressionistic expression of Margery Kempe herself and the more didactic approach of her clerical readers and annotators.

In the next chapter, *Piers Plowman* presents an intermediary example of such experiential epistemologies and expressions as Langland applies ideas similar to echoic mysticism toward his more self-consciously literary poem, which nevertheless engages with a mystical concern to seek spiritual truth. I situate Langland's revisions to *Piers Plowman* in relation to a strand of literary theory on *vox*, which was freshly animated in the late fourteenth-century

writings of John Wyclif and his followers, also called lollards. In his revisions between the B and C versions of the poem, Langland registers anxieties about the seductive physicality of sound. But he also articulates what I call a poetics of lolling: a mode of attention or attunement to the ways that the sounds of language can multiply sense, creating a space for associative and recursive thinking that resists a linear path toward perfect knowledge or truth. Other writing in the *Piers Plowman* tradition, most notably the fifteenth-century alliterative poem *Mum and the Sothsegger*, suggests that such a poetics of lolling contributed to the public poetry of social critique in the fifteenth century.

In the final two chapters I examine how Chaucer's poetry adapts these ideas to a more secular epistemological framework. In his early dream vision, *The House of Fame*, Chaucer draws from medieval grammatical theories of *vox* in order to dismantle conventional literate authority and articulate his own lay poetics of noise (chapter 4). The problem at the center of the narrative is the Dreamer's refusal to listen for "tydynges," a term the poem links to the popular voice both as "news" and as "noise." His dream journey begins in the space of the *vox articulata*, which was linked to Latin learning and rhetorical control, and leads him increasingly into the realm of the *vox confusa*: the uncontrolled noise of public and social life, which Chaucer pairs with lay experience. In his later work, *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer develops this link between sound and experiential knowledge through the Wife of Bath. Indeed, the Wife gives the lay epistemology articulated in Chaucer's *House of Fame* a body and a gender in a way that is consistent with the antifeminist and misogamist texts that Chaucer drew from in his characterization (chapter 5). Just as his source Walter Map depicts the female voice as sensually alluring but ultimately hollow, the Wife of Bath's "jangling" indicates her focus on physical surface over spiritual substance. Chaucer frames the Wife's partial deafness as a means of listening to sounds rather than semantic content. Yet unlike his source material, Chaucer outlines the place of such "reduced listening"—and resulting noise—as a form of experiential lay literacy alternative to the cognitive and physical violence of masculine authority.

In the epilogue, *World of Echo* briefly situates these epistemologies of noise in relation to pre-Reformation ideals and practices of lay religiosity and gestures to how this religious thinking about the interplay of sound and sense scaffolded poetics and literary theory at several other historical moments. My emphasis in the epilogue is on James Joyce's treatment of noise—in particular the motif of God as a "shout in the street"—in his novel *Ulysses*, from which I draw this book's epigraphs. By lingering on this work of high modernism, I join many scholars in challenging a sharp divide between the Middle Ages

and modernity, showing the pervasive influence of religious thought even on enlightened secular knowledge that defined itself off of what was perceived to be a benighted and superstitious medieval other. Moreover, in tracing how the palpable sensory aspects of language have historically been understood to be integral to the perception and expression of lay knowledge, this book, I hope, offers a way to ethically reorient ourselves toward language. If we read and listen in more abundant ways—ways that attend to the sounds, shapes, cadences, and textures of language—we may find a fuller and more generous understanding of the world and our place within it.

CHAPTER 1

"Clamor Iste Canor Est"

Rolle's Heavenly Song and the Lay Theology of Noise

> —That is God.
> Hooray! Ay! Whrrwhee!
> —What? Mr. Deasy asked.
> —A shout in the street, Stephen answered, shrugging his shoulders.
>
> —James Joyce, *Ulysses*, "Nestor" (28)

In the final chapter of his *Incendium Amoris* or "fire of love," the fourteenth-century hermit Richard Rolle recalls his early religious fervor:

> In the beginning of my conversion, and of my singular purpose, I thought I wished to be compared to the little bird, which languishes because of love for its lover, but in languishing, rejoices for the one coming to him, who he loves, and in rejoicing sings; and in singing, languishes, but in sweetness and warmth. It is said that the nightingale indulges all night in song and in melody, in order that it might be pleasing to him with whom she is coupled. How much more should I sing, with greatest sweetness, to my Jesus Christ, who is spouse of my soul, through all this present life.[1]

1. "In principio enim conuersionis mee, et propositi singularis, cogitaui me uelle assimilari auicule, que pre amore languet amati sui, sed languendo eciam letatur adueniente sibi quod amat et letando canit, canendo eciam languet, sed in dulcedine et ardore. Fertur enim philomena tota nocte cantui et melo indulgere, ut ei placeat, cui copulatur. Quanto magis cum suauitate maxima canerem Christo meo Ihesu, qui est sponsus anime mee per totam uitam presentem." Richard Rolle, *The Incendium Amoris of Richard Rolle of Hampole*, ed. Margaret Deanesly (New York: Longman, 1915), 277. All subsequent citations of the *Incendium Amoris* will be cited parenthetically from this edition.

Rolle's characteristic love-language demonstrates an impulse to describe his relationship with God in terms of the emotional bonds and bodily feeling of a melancholic lover.[2] His choice of the nightingale as a persona for his youthful longing draws on a long literary tradition that linked the song of the nightingale to passionate devotion and lament.[3] By identifying *canor* as birdsong, Rolle also emphasizes its nonsemantic properties. His description of the nightingale's love for its mate is flush with references to corporeal sensations and phenomena: the sweetness and warmth of its lovesick languor, and the song that emerges from it.[4] These sensory elements—heat, sweetness, and song—are fundamental to Rolle's program for the development of spiritual knowledge. It is my aim in this chapter to sketch how and why Rolle presents his experience of these sensations—especially of *canor* or mystical song—as an extrasemantic experience of sound. This emphasis on extrasemantic experience amplifies how Rolle's theology theorizes voice and establishes his place as a foundational figure in a vernacular devotional tradition grounded in sound and noise.

Writing in the mid-fourteenth century, several decades before the efflorescence of mystical prose by writers like Julian of Norwich, Walter Hilton, and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Rolle is generally read as a foundational figure for the development of affective piety in England: a shift in lay religiosity that cultivated a more direct and unmediated access to spiritual knowledge through affective and sensory experience.[5] This influence was in part because Rolle's writings were widely copied and read from the 1390s into the fifteenth century, including by laywomen like Margery Kempe.[6] Rolle's experience of *canor* or mystical song has been an important

2. Sarah McNamer has explored the marital dynamic between the mystic and Christ in terms of affective "scripts" in medieval English and Italian literature. See McNamer, *Affective Meditation*.

3. Rolle's most direct source from this tradition was likely the poetry of his Franciscan predecessor and fellow northerner John of Howden. Howden's Anglo-Norman poem *Li Rossignos* (*The Nightingale*) reworked an earlier Latin poem *Philomela* (*Song of Love*), both of which are said to have influenced Rolle's mysticism. See Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 19. For more on John of Howden, see Denis Renevey, "1215–1349: Texts," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism*, ed. Samuel Fanous and Vincent Gillespie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 103–5.

4. For a discussion of how this passage fits with Rolle's notion of *canor*, see Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*, 121–23.

5. See for example Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*, 18–27 and throughout. For a useful overview of the textual tradition of affective piety from its supposed origins in thirteenth-century continental Europe into late medieval England, see McNamer, who discusses Rolle's foundational role in this tradition in *Affective Meditation*, 119–25.

6. Rolle's works of instruction seem to have been read first by a small circle of Yorkshire nuns and hermits. After 1390 they became known in the circles of Archbishop Thomas Arundel, and then

part of the study of affective mysticism and the history of the senses in England as scholars like Andrew Albin and others have called attention to the importance of sound and music in Rollean notions of *canor* and the mystical traditions that follow them.[7] Yet few scholars have fully explored the prevalence of noise in the *Incendium*, where Rolle perceives heavenly *canor* as *tinnitum*, and responds in joyous love with an expression of *clamor*.

Rolle's impulse to frame the experience and expression of heavenly *canor* as extrasemantic experience both draws from and revises a long intellectual tradition that distinguished between interior and exterior sensation and voice. While these views are evident in a diverse array of medieval theoretical traditions, as we will see in subsequent chapters, here I offer an overview of their treatment in Augustinian thought and gesture to the ways that similar ideas animated early writing on the role of song in the liturgy. In these arenas medieval thinkers elevated the role of interior sensation—the stirrings of the soul aroused by the love of God—and embraced the "voice of the heart" as a means of approaching ultimate truth. Mystical union with God—and the knowledge that emerged from it—was cultivated with the inner senses and took place in a silence beyond language.[8]

Rolle's writing shows ambivalence about such silence and interior sensation in a way that scholars have not yet acknowledged. Like Augustine, Jerome, and others, he is suspicious about the sensations of the body, repeatedly emphasizing that his mystical heat, sweetness, and song emerge from within him rather than from external stimuli. Yet by framing his experience and expression of *canor* as noise, Rolle invites us to attend to its physicality and affective force. Katherine Zieman links Rolle's *canor* to his

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were copied and translated systematically for a lay readership in the fifteenth century. This trajectory of dissemination, from the structured world of religious houses into a larger literary milieu of laypeople seeking spiritual edification, was characteristic of much of the contemplative art and writing of the period. See Jeremy Catto, "1349–1412: Culture and History," in Fanous and Gillespie, *Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism*, 113–14.

7. See, for example, Albin, "Listening for *Canor*." See also Tekla Bude, "*Panis Angelorum*: Rollean *Canor* and *Piers Plowman*," *YLS* 29 (2015): 3–23; Christopher M. Roman, *Queering Richard Rolle: Mystical Theology and the Hermit in Fourteenth-Century England* (New York: Palgrave, 2017), 85–115; Katherine Zieman, "The Perils of *Canor*: Mystical Authority, Alliteration, and Extragrammatical Meaning in Rolle, the Cloud Author, and Hilton," *YLS* 22 (2008): 131–64.

8. Beth Williamson, for example, has instructively turned to the subject of silence to stress a need to attend to forms of sensory experience and expression that resist representation in medieval religious thought and culture. See Williamson, "Sensory Experience in Medieval Devotion." I offer noise as another way of attending to the nonrepresentational in medieval devotional culture and beyond. For more on the importance of silence in medieval religious thought, see also Gehl, "*Competens Silentium*" and Bruce, *Silence and Sign Language in Medieval Monasticism*.

"extragrammatical" uses of language.[9] For Zieman, Rolle's use of alliteration—long acknowledged as his most common stylistic flourish—begins to suggest how literariness and the aesthetic beauty of language might serve an important purpose and not simply be, in her words "a refuge from the intellectual labors of interiority that vernacular theology demands."[10] Yet she is characteristic of many scholars when she writes that Rolle's perception of *fervor*, *dulcor*, and *canor* were "decidedly sensual, *if not corporeal*."[11] Zieman's treatment does not fully account for Rolle's persistent interest in noise. For Rolle, aesthetic experience is an experience of song as noise; its purpose is an emotional and corporeal way of knowing God.

Ultimately, Rolle develops a mode of what I will call echoic mysticism, in which the mystic first perceives divine knowledge as noise (*tinnitum*), then re-sounds it as noise (*clamor*), echoing it back through the body with an ecstatic expression of mystical joy. For Rolle, this knowledge can be understood only as a feeling—in both senses of the word. It is an interplay of emotion and sensation that intensifies the mutual dependence of the inner and outer senses. These feelings resist containment in language. Yet in both his autobiographical Latin and pastoral writing in English, Rolle works to convey and enact them in readers with his poetics and play with language, of which his characteristic alliteration is only one example. Such poetics, even when incorporated into prose, is a means of foregrounding the sounded, material properties of language over its conceptual aspects.

Rolle's stylistics of noise serves to describe and ultimately to enact what Cristina Maria Cervone has called a certain "supereffability," or, as she explains "an understanding of sacred fullness enacted through form."[12] In doing so, it gestures toward the radical and unorthodox nature of Rolle's spiritual program. Scholars have underscored the complexly subversive impulse in the affective

9. Zieman, "Perils of *Canor*." Zieman argues that Rolle's *canor* is spiritually potent because of its affective force rather than its grammatical meaning. Rolle's interest in the extragrammatical properties of language shows how his writing fits within the body of work that equipped the laity with a more direct access to spiritual knowledge than was available to them through the mediation of priests or other educated authority figures. For Zieman, this highlights how even Rolle's Latin writing can be considered part of the body of texts and devotional practices scholars refer to as "vernacular theology." Though he was not the first to use the phrase "vernacular theology" or to explore the concept, Nicholas Watson drew the discussion most forcefully into the context of late medieval England. See Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409," *Speculum* 70, no. 4 (1995): 822–64. For an overview, see Vincent Gillespie, "Vernacular Theology," in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 401–20.

10. Zieman, "Perils of *Canor*," 133.

11. Zieman, "Perils of *Canor*," 138 (emphasis added).

12. Cervone, *Poetics of the Incarnation*, 5.

devotional practices that emerged as a means of cultivating spiritual knowledge without the mediation of priestly authority.[13] Rolle offers us a more capacious understanding of this form of resistance, allowing us to explore subtle structures of dissent in the ways that formal patterns equip readers to forge new pathways of experience—and with it thought. Cervone has called attention to the ways that medieval religious authors embraced "pleyn" speech in its fundamental etymological sense as *plenus* or "full," engaging metaphor and other formal patterns in order to indicate the ways that "the supereffable, in its intellectually challenging fullness, may offer a means of approaching the ineffable."[14] We might understand the bodily response Rolle identifies and enacts to be significant without explicitly signifying, to be meaningful—in its very literal sense as "full of meanings"—without dogmatic content. Rolle's echoic mysticism amplifies the fundamental impulse within affective piety to accept the body, in all its pain and pleasure, as a means of accessing spiritual knowledge in a direct and experiential way.[15] This impulse can be tied to a tradition of vernacular literature, both religious and secular, that elevates lay forms of knowledge by embracing an experience of language as noise, in which somatic elements overtake semantic. But first, let us turn inward by way of Augustine, and to the sensations we may find there.

Silence and the Noise of Language in Augustinian Thought

In his *Confessions*, as Augustine describes a mystical vision shared in conversation with his mother Monica shortly before her death, he outlines a mystical theology of silence. In the midst of the thronging Roman city of Ostia, the two sequester themselves in a garden, "at a distance from the crowd." From this place of quietude, they converse "very sweetly," becoming so absorbed

13. Sarah Beckwith, for example, highlights an inherently subversive dynamic in mystical texts that reveals a paradox regarding their relation to authority. On the one hand, they derive authority from claims to be an original or direct transcription of the word of God. On the other hand, they inevitably add to or supplement that source, thus suggesting that it may not be the final word of authority. See Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture, and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 20. Watson's overview of shifts in English lay religiosity cited above also addresses the subversive nature of affective piety. See Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*, 18–27.

14. Cervone, *Poetics of the Incarnation*, 9–11.

15. Roman's articulation of Rolle's "ecology of *canor*," in which heavenly song permeates the body of the mystic rendering it porous and open to its surroundings, similarly emphasizes the place of sound in facilitating an ecstatic bodily experience that dissolves the boundaries of the body and the self. See *Queering Richard Rolle*, 85–115.

in the conversation that they are "forgetful" of the past, reaching instead toward the future and seeking the "present truth," or God himself.[16] In his analysis of this passage Paul Gehl points to the importance of this forgetfulness, noting that because Augustine understood the memory to be a crucial faculty for earthly rather than spiritual knowledge, the transcendence of memory he describes here is necessary in order to attain knowledge of divine things.[17] Indeed, their conversation yields spiritual fruit. Augustine recalls: "And while we were thus conversing and panting after [present truth], we touched it, barely, with a stroke of the heart; and we sighed . . . and returned to the noise (*strepitum*) of our mouths, where the word both is begun and ended."[18] Surrounded by the noise of the world, through a contained exchange of sweet and holy language, Augustine and Monica momentarily transcend time and language, "touch[ing]" knowledge of divine things, before returning to the noise of the world.

In its juxtaposition of spiritual quietude with the noise of the world, this passage is consistent with an overall tendency to distinguish between interior and exterior communication and sensation. Medieval theologians and exegetes sought to separate and reconcile the meaning of language and its physical form. As they articulated practices for correct reading and interpretation, they subordinated the external physical experience of language to its conceptual aspects by distinguishing between interior and exterior perception and vocalization. Scholars like Eric Jager have shown how medieval ideas about the inner and outer aspects of language were tied to understandings of the biblical Fall. To Augustine and other influential church thinkers, Adam and Eve's transgression in the Garden of Eden had marked a descent from the direct interior communication of knowledge to an indirect knowledge mediated through signs as they were perceived by the body. Before the Fall, knowledge passed directly and simultaneously into intellect. After the Fall, Adam and Eve discovered that they could only communicate with "the clumsy artifice of language and gesture," in the words of Peter Brown.[19]

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16. "Illic apud Ostia Tibernia, ubi remote a turbis post longi itineris laborem instaurabamus nos navigationi. Conloquebamur ergo soli valde dulciter; et praeterita obliviscentes in ea quae ante sunt extenti, quaerebamus inter nos apud praesentem veritatem, quod tu es." Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. William Watts (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 2:46. Translations are mine, though they are guided by Watts's facing-page translations from this edition.

17. Gehl, *"Competens Silentium,"* 132.

18. "Et dum loquimur et inhiamus illi, attingimus eam modice toto ictu cordis; et suspiravimus, . . . et remeavimus ad strepitum oris nostri, ubi verbum et incipitur et finitur." Augustine, *Confessions*, 2:48–50.

19. Eric Jager, *The Tempter's Voice: Language and the Fall in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 261.

The aim of understanding and contemplation was to return to an ideal state of interior rather than exterior perception and communication with God. In his *Confessions*, Augustine repeatedly affirms that he listens to God with the "ears of his heart" (aures cordis) and pleads with his own soul "not . . . to become deaf in the ear of [the] heart" (Noli . . . obsurdescere in aure cordis).[20] In keeping with this interior model of communication, Augustine likewise asserts that he speaks to God with his heart's voice (*voce cordis*).[21] Such exchange occurs in silence. Indeed, as the passage above suggests, Augustine frequently juxtaposes the true interior knowledge of God that occurs in silence with the "noise" of human speech. Yet, as Gehl and other scholars have highlighted, for Augustine, language is paradoxically the only avenue for achieving mystical silence.[22] Augustine and Monica achieve spiritual knowledge through sweet conversation, removed from the world. The correct engagement with language is a means of moving beyond language into true—and silent—knowledge of God.

The productive tension between language and silence comes into focus in the virtuosic passage that follows Augustine's account of his communal vision with Monica, in which he reflects on silence, the topic of their conversation. Its starting point, we learn, is the biblical injunction to "enter into the joy of your God" (Matthew 25:21). Pondering this phrase, the two wonder:

> If for anyone the tumults of the flesh were to fall quiet; quiet the fantasies of the earth, the waters, the air, quiet the celestial vault; and if the very soul to itself be quiet, and transcend itself in not considering itself; and the dreams and imaginary revelations be quiet; if every tongue, every sign, and whatsoever passes away be utterly quiet to anyone, since if one listens, all those things say "We did not create ourselves, but he who remains in eternity made us": if, with these things being said, they too were silent, thus arousing the ear toward the one who made them, and if he should speak alone, not through them, but through himself, as we hear his word not by means of the tongue of the flesh, nor by the voices of angels, nor by the sound of storm clouds, nor by the enigma of reflection, but if we hear he himself whom we love in these things, he himself without those others, just

20. Augustine, *Confessions*, 1:10, 176. Other references to the "ear of the heart" occur elsewhere, including at 162.

21. Augustine, *Confessions*, 2:56.

22. Gehl outlines Augustine's understanding of silence in *"Competens Silentium,"* 129–34. For more on Augustine's paradoxical view of language, see Marcia Colish, *The Mirror of Language: A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 7–54.

> as now we extend ourselves and with swift thought touch eternal wisdom, remaining over all things, if this were to continue, and other visions of an unequal kind fall away at a distance, and this alone snatch, and absorb, and conceal the joy of your spectators in its interior, as much as the eternal life is, that much was this moment of intelligence, for which we sigh, is it not this: "Enter into the joy (*gaudium*) of your God"?[23]

Here, Augustine describes how those in the world seek to know God through physical signs—the words of the fleshly tongue or the thunder of storm clouds. Yet the knowledge that emerges from such perception is limited, as Augustine reminds us by invoking the "enigma" of 1 Corinthians 13:12: "We see now through a glass darkly, then face to face."[24] To transcend the physical world, here encompassed in the phrase "tumult of the flesh" (tumultus carnis), is to move past sounds, past signs, and into an eternal realm of silence and quietude in the pure and complete knowledge of God. Yet this understanding can only begin and end with human language, which, in comparison to such silence, amounts to little more than noise, existing as it does in the body and in time. Augustine's hypotactic prose sets subordinate clauses within individual links in an extended chain of conditionals to create a sentence of superlative length. In the wake of a silent mystical vision, outside of time, body, and words, Augustine's measured and ornate rhetorical style calls attention to the temporality and physical matter of his own language as he recollects the experience. As Gehl writes, "From this high region [of vision], one can only tumble back to the noise of conversation, and wonder—rather wordily—about it."[25]

This passage, then, begins to underscore two twinned paradoxes that were fundamental to medieval Christian thought. The first held that Christ

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23. "Si cui sileat tumultus carnis, sileant phantasiae terrae, et aquarum et aeris, sileant et poli et ipsa sibi anima sileat, et transeat se non se cogitando, sileant somnia et imaginariae revelationes, omnis lingua et omne signum et quidquid transeundo fit si cui sileat omnino—quoniam si quis audiat, dicunt haec omnia: non ipsa nos fecimus, sed fecit nos qui manet in aeternum: his dictis si iam taceant, quoniam erexerunt aurem in eum, qui fecit ea, et loquatur ipse solus non per ea, sed per se ipsum, ut audiamus verbum eius, non per linguam carnis neque per vocem angeli nec per sonitum nubis nec per aenigma similitudines, sed ipsum, quem in his amamus, ipsum sine his audiamus, sicut nunc extendimus nos et rapida cogitatione attingimus aeternam sapientiam super omnia manentem, si continuetur hoc et subtrahantur aliae visiones longe inparis generis, et haec una rapiat et absorbeat et recondat in interiora gaudia spectatorum suum, ut talis sit sempiterna vita quale fuit hoc momentum intelligentiae, cui suspiravimus, nonne hoc est: Intra in gaudium domini tui?" Augustine, *Confessions*, 2:50.

24. "Videmus nunc per speculum in enigmate, tunc autem facie ad faciem." Jan Ziolkowski, gen. ed., *The Vulgate Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010–13), 6:916.

25. Gehl, "*Competens Silentium*," 132.

was the word made flesh, his incarnation offering salvation for the sins of fleshly desire. In this view, the body was a source of sin, but also, ultimately, of salvation. The second related notion maintained that language—in all its embodied materiality—was the best way to transcend the material world and access the true knowledge of God, which took place in silence. Indeed, it is important to note that Augustine understands the ultimate knowledge of God as a form of bliss or "gaudium"—a word that conveys both spiritual and sensory delight. As we will see, Augustine's mystical *gaudium* anticipates Rolle's notion of *iocunditas* or spiritual pleasure. This emphasis on enjoyment was precariously aligned with both the body and the spirit, and so was consistent with the erotic and sensual tropes—the mystic as perfect spouse and lover of Christ, for example—that would come to dominate affective literature and devotional practices in the high and late Middle Ages.[26]

Rolle's Inner Experience and the Noise of the World

Rolle's accounts of his own mystical experiences place him ambiguously, both within and outside of this Christian intellectual tradition. His relationship with the official culture of the church, and the active life of evangelizing it advocated, was complex. An Oxford-trained scholar, Rolle left the university at age nineteen after a religious conversion. Rather notoriously, he departed the city and retreated into the countryside wearing a patchwork hermit's habit that he had fashioned for himself out of his sister's dresses. Despite his pastoral work guiding the devotional practices of female religious, no records show that Rolle was ever ordained. Officially, he was a layman.[27] These details of his life emphasize a contradictory stance toward the body. On the one hand, Rolle's retreat to live as a hermit points to his

26. See, for example, McNamer, *Affective Meditation*. Several chapters underscore the erotic valences of compassion with respect to Nicholas Love's devotional texts (chap. 4) and Passion lyrics (chap. 6).

27. Jonathan Hughes, "Rolle, Richard (1305x10–1349), hermit and religious author," *ODNB*, https://www.oxforddnb.com. The striking background of Rolle's hermit's habit has been loosely identified as an example of his tendency to perform femininity in the context of his religious devotion. See McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, 119–20. Though she cautions against making too much of this episode, McNamer uses it to begin her chapter on how Rolle popularized "feeling like a woman" in personal devotion, noting that it is suggestive of Rolle's willingness to "engage in feminine self-fashioning." Wolfgang Riehle, *The Secret Within: Hermits, Recluses, and Spiritual Outsiders in Medieval England*, trans. Charity Scott-Stokes (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), also reads this episode as evidence of Rolle's particularly "theatrical" mysticism (72), and stresses Rolle's "rather feminine sensitivity" (97). Christopher M. Roman takes this sartorial episode from Rolle's biography further than either McNamer or Riehle, asserting that it "begins a queer journey in which Rolle defines himself in opposition to normative structures of family, wealth, church, and theology." See Roman,

desire to escape what Augustine might call the "tumult" of the world, with all its sensory stimuli. On the other hand, his emphasis on the performance and practice of devotion—the theatrical costumed withdrawal and the spiritual advisement without an official name or title—suggests an embrace of experience performed and perceived with the body. It is to these apparently conflicting views that I now turn.

Rolle's suspicion of the physical world and its allurements is writ large throughout his corpus of work, which often upholds traditional distinctions between inner and outer sensation. The *Incendium* begins with an autobiographical account of his first experience of *calor* or mystical heat:

> I wondered more than I say completely, when I felt my heart first warm; and truly, not imaginarily, as if it burned with perceptible flame. I was astonished at the way this ardor erupted in my soul, and at the unaccustomed solace, on account of whose abundance I was inexperienced. Frequently I probed my heart in case by chance the heat might be from any exterior cause. And when I had come to realize that fire of love effervesced from my interior alone, and that it was not from flesh or concupiscence (*concupiscentia*), in this I maintained that it was a gift of the Maker. Overjoyed, I melted into the passion of greater pleasure, and especially because of the influence of this most sweet delight and this internal sweetness, which irrigated my mind with this spiritual heat from the marrow (*medullitus*).[28]

Rolle emphasizes that his mystical feelings of heat come from an interior emotional cause rather than external stimuli, which would render the burning love he feels into "concupiscentia" or lust. His feelings, by contrast, are "medullitus," stemming from his inner marrow or essence: an outpouring of the longing he feels for God. Rolle is at pains to note that his perception of *calor* is not located in the imagination. Andrew Albin notes that Rolle's renunciation of the imagination here and at other moments in the *Incendium* stems from a strand of Aristotelian philosophy that emphasized the imagination's

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Queering Richard Rolle, 2. For more on the details of Rolle's life and their interpretation, see Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*, 31–53.

28. "Admirabar magis quam enuncio quando siquidem sentiui cor meum primitus incalescere, et uere non imaginarie, quasi sensibile igne estuare. Eram equidem attonitus quemadmodum eruperat ardor in animo, et de insolito solacio propter inexperienciam huius abundancie: sepius pectus meum si forte esset feruor ex aliqua exteriori causa palpitaui. Cumque cognouissem quod ex interiori solumodo efferbuisset, et non esset a carne illud incendium amoris, et concupiscencia, in qua continui, quod donum esset Conditoris, letabundus liquefactus sum in affectum amplioris dileccionis, et precipue propter influenciam delectationis suauissime et suauitatis interne que cum ipso caumate spirituali mentem meam medullitus irrorauit" (145).

derivation from the material world, and thus its susceptibility to demonic influence.[29] By rejecting the imagination, Rolle draws attention to the divine source of his mystical experience.

These distinctions between inner and outer sensation are in keeping with Rolle's views on silence and contemplation. He explains, "The highest love of Christ consists in three things: in heat (*fervore*), in song (*canore*), and in sweetness (*dulcore*); and these three things, in my experience cannot remain in mind for long without great quiet."[30] He stresses that the perfect lover of God must remove himself from the world:

> I reckon it the greatest miracle when anyone, through God's grace and the love of Christ, spurns these allurements (*alliciencia*) completely, and applying the soul among those [allurements], although they seem soft to the flesh, ascends in a manly way (*viriliter*) to the utmost holiness of heavenly contemplation.[31]

With a misogyny characteristic of much medieval theology and religious thought, Rolle asserts that the mystic should steel himself against those sensual enticements that are harmful to the soul, though they are pleasing to the flesh. Doing so will allow him to ascend "in a manly way" to the height of mystical knowledge.

This suspicion of the physical world informs a larger disdain for approaches to spiritual knowledge that are exclusively or primarily grounded in the intellect rather than the emotions of devotion. Rolle cautions against prideful pursuits of knowledge, offering the love cultivated in solitude and silent contemplation as the most fundamental and transcendent form of knowing God. He remarks, "Among all things that we drive and ponder, let us incline ourselves more to divine love than to knowledge (*sciencie*) and disputation. Indeed, love delights the soul and brings about a sweet conscience, drawing it away from inferior pleasures and from appetite for one's own excellence."[32] Here Rolle distinguishes between intellective and affective approaches to knowledge, advocating the knowledge of "divine love" over academic *scientia*, a term that encompassed a broader field of

29. Albin, "Listening for *Canor*," 184–85.

30. "Summus amor Christi in tribus consistit: in *fervore*, in *canore*, et in *dulcore*; et hec tria ego expertus sum in mente non posse diu persistere sine magna quiete" (185).

31. "Maximum ergo miraculum estimo cum quis per graciam Dei et amorem Christi hec alliciencia perfecte contempnitur, et inter illa anime aduersancia quamuis carni mollia uideantur, ad eximam superne contemplacionis sanctitatem uiriliter ascendit" (166).

32. "Inter omnia que agimus aut cogitamus magis intendamus diuino amori quam sciencie et disputacioni. Amor enim delectat animam et suauem efficit conscienciam, trahens eam a delectacione inferiorum delectabilium et appetitu proprie excellencie" (157).

knowledge and academic pursuit than its modern cognate. This desired love is not a worldly love that "delights more in the creature than in the Creator" and "prefers the pleasures of visible appearance to conceptual clarity."[33] It is a love that stems from within rather than without and offers its own form of understanding. For Rolle, the knowledge that comes from spiritual love is more perfect than that of academic disputation and other intellectual pursuits of the clerical estate. He goes on to assert that "While we incline ourselves immoderately to investigation, we do not feel the sweetness of eternal delight."[34]

Rolle's distinction between intellectual and affective knowledge allows him to emphasize the widespread accessibility of the latter among the laity, underscoring his impulse to empower the laity to cultivate spiritual knowledge without priestly or clerical mediation. He explains, "an old woman (*uetula*) is more expert in the love of God and less in the pleasures of the world than a theologian whose study is idle because he studies for vanity and in order that he might be known and appear glorious, [and] in order that he might acquire returns and titles."[35] In Rolle's view, intellectual approaches to knowledge have been too much turned toward the goals of personal gain among educated clerics. By emphasizing the potential virtue of the *vetula* or "little old lady," Rolle draws on long-standing cultural associations—later taken up by Chaucer in his depiction of the Wife of Bath—that linked old women with lay forms of knowledge that were, for better or worse, in opposition to clerical authority.[36] While other depictions of the *vetula* are dubious or ambivalent about her lay knowledge, Rolle's treatment is undoubtedly positive.

An autobiographical passage from later in the *Incendium* underscores Rolle's point that women may hold more spiritual wisdom than those among the educated elite. Rolle recalls how the rebukes of three women caused him to turn away from the active life, toward the contemplative. The first

33. "Non audio dicere omnem amorem bonum esse: quia ille amor qui magis delectatur in creatura quam in Creatore, et proponit delectabilitatem uisibilis speciei intellectuali claritati, malus est et odibilis, quia auertit ab eterno amore et conuertit ad temporalem, qui durare non potest" (195).

34. "Dum enim inuestigacioni immoderate incumbimus, dulcorem profecto eterne suauitatis non sentimus" (160).

35. "Uetula plus experitur de Dei amore et minus de mundi uoluptate quam theologus, cuius studium uanum est, quia pro uanitate studet ut sciatur et gloriosus appareat, ut redditus et dignitates adquirat qui stultus non doctus meretur reputari" (160).

36. For more on the trope of the *vetula* in medieval intellectual history, see Alastair Minnis, *Fallible Authors: Chaucer's Pardoner and the Wife of Bath* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 294–312.

woman rebukes Rolle because he "inspected her too closely," which Rolle attributes to his being "desirous" to denounce her "foolish" garments.[37] The second woman reproaches him because he "spoke of her huge breasts as if [he] delighted in them."[38] In both of these examples, Rolle chastises a woman for her sins, first her immodest dress and then her voluptuous body. Yet he implies that his overzealous impulse toward correction veered dangerously into the realm of taking pleasure in the sin he corrected. In his rather cryptic third example, Rolle explains that a woman instructed him "Quiet, brother!" when he "threatened [her] as if [he] rudely wished to touch her, or did touch her."[39] As Rolle recalls this woman's rebuke, he includes a telling interjection: "it was as if she had said, 'it doesn't go with your office of hermit to fool around with women.'"[40] Here, Rolle unexpectedly frames the role of the active male cleric, correcting the sins of his female parishioners, as an indiscreet act, one that may even culminate with an improper sexual encounter ("or *did* touch her"). He counterintuitively uses the wisdom of three women to emphasize an earlier point that it is necessary to resist immoderation and the temptations of the flesh in order to ascend toward spiritual knowledge. These examples draw attention to how Rolle's ideas stem from the orthodox intellectual tradition, even as they diverge from it by cultivating a form of lay knowledge on its own terms.

Like many mystics of his time, Rolle sought to outline the ideal conditions for developing such unmediated knowledge. Withdrawal from the business and desires of the physical world was necessary to mute the outer senses and cultivate inner perception. His pastoral treatise *The Form of Living* asserts that one way to judge that the contemplative soul dwells in charity is "hardynes of thought to suffer al angres and noyes þat cometh."[41] In the same tract Rolle charges that his disciple Margaret Kirkby reject "þe foul noyes of thoughtes þat ben ydel" and emphasizes the need for solitary meditation so that the would-be mystic might "secheth withjnnen grete silence fro þe noyes of couetise and vanytees and erthly thoughtis."[42] In *Ego Dormio*, another instructional tract, Rolle asserts that "This degree of loue is cald

37. "Cupiens corrigere insanium earum in superfluitate et mollicie uestium, ornatum illarum immoderatum nimis inspexi" (178).

38. "De mammis eius grossis loquebar quasi me delectarent" (178).

39. "Minabar quasi rude eam tangere uellem, uel tetigi" (178).

40. "Quasi dixisset, 'Non pertinent ad statum tuum, scilicet hermeticum ludere cum mulieribus'" (178–79).

41. Richard Rolle, *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse*, ed. S. J. Ogilvie-Thomson (Oxford: EETS, 1988), 23.

42. Rolle, *Prose and Verse*, 25 and 23.

contemplative lif, þat loueth to be [onely] withouten ryngen or dyn and syngynge and criying."[43] In short, Rolle values the contemplative life precisely because it sets the mystic apart from both the physical and cognitive noise of earthly concerns and distractions.

As he does in his later pastoral writing, following Augustine, Rolle's *Incendium* uses the concept of noise to refer to the sensations and desires that stem from contact with the external, physical world. He asserts that in contrast to the solitary man, the man who lives in the midst of "tumult" (tumultus) is distracted and can rarely meditate or pray (181). The Latin word *tumultus* encompassed the notion of "disquiet" in both its kinesthetic sense as physiocognitive confusion or disturbance, and in its sonic sense as noisy uproar. By the mid-fifteenth century, Richard Misyn, a Carmelite friar and translator of Rolle's *Incendium*, chose to translate "tumultum" as "clatteryng," a word with connotations of aural disorder, as in Modern English, and also physical violence.[44]

As distractions from the true pursuit of God, such noise was a form of deceptive self-delusion. The *Incendium* outlines the fraudulent pleasures of the "lying world," concluding:

> [The world] has its groaning gems, its laughable praise, its livid lilies, its strepitous song, its putrid beauties, its discordant concords, its soiled snow, its desolate comforts, its wealthless kingdom. And it has its nightingale more mooing than a cow, its corvine voice, its unknowing song, its sheep clothed in foxskin, and its dove more ferocious than wild beasts.[45]

All the pleasing noises of the physical world—song, concord, and the singing of melodious birds—are a form of noise because they allure or flatter the physical senses and draw their listeners away from spiritual things with their pleasures. The nightingale notably appears again, this time with a less flattering description. By framing such sounds as noise, Rolle signals that experiencing aural delight in a worldly way is spiritually noxious and harms the soul. His lengthy string of rhetorical antitheses is often ornamented with

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43. Rolle, *Prose and Verse*, 31.

44. Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love and the Mending of Life or the Rule of Living*, trans. Richard Misyn, ed. Ralph Harvey (London: EETS, 1896), 30. For the range of definitions of *clateren* in Middle English, see *MED*, s.v. "clatteren", https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary.

45. "Habet [mundus] et gementem gemmam, et laudem ludibrium, lilium liuorem, cantum clangorem, speciem putridinem, discordem concordiam, niuem ingredinem, solacium desolatorium, inopem regnum. Habet et philomenam magis uacca mugientem; merulinam uocem, melum nescientem; ouem uulpinam pellem induentem; et columbam, plus fera furientem" (259–60).

alliteration ("gementem gemmam," "cantem clangorem"), consonance, and other soundplay ("laudem ludibrium," "fera furientem," "discordem concordiam"). The effect of this impulse is an encounter with language in which its material elements underscore the empty and worldly nature of the pleasures he describes. Here the experience of language as noise amplifies the problem that preoccupies Rolle, threatening to mire the reader in the sensations of the world.

Cantus, *Musica*, and Liturgical Song in Early Christianity

Medieval thinkers were keenly aware of the slippery oscillation between spiritual and carnal knowledge that emerged from language. Early debates about the place of psalmic song in the liturgy—the biblical word sung and set to music as part of religious ritual—is a particularly fruitful area to examine how early theologians scrutinized, and justified to varying degrees, the role of the body in religious education. These debates highlight how they grappled with the epistemological hierarchies outlined by early music theorists like Boethius and others. In the influential view, which Boethius outlined in his *De institutione musica*, the true musician held an abstract knowledge of the mathematical proportions and ratios of music, while the more base knowledge of the musical practitioner was grounded in the regular bodily repetition of playing or singing, a kind of muscle memory that Boethius deemed "servitude" (servitio) in opposition to free rational *imperium*.[46] This view undergirded centuries of distinction between *musica* and *cantus* or liturgical chant. While the former was the object of abstract rational knowledge, the latter was often, though not always, the object of a more mechanical knowledge based in bodily repetition.[47] For early theologians, this dynamic presented questions and problems regarding both cantor and audience. Singing or listening to such chant could elevate the soul of the pious layperson, lifting it away from the base domain of bodily pleasure toward a higher spiritual realm. Yet singers and audience—lay and cleric alike—ran the risk of

46. Boethius, *Anicii Manlii Torquati Severini Boetii, De institutione musica libri duo, De institutione musica libri quinque, accredit Geometria quae fertur Boetii*, ed. Gottfried Friedlein (Leipzig: B. G. Teubneri, 1867), 223–24. For a translation, see *Fundamentals of Music*, trans. Calvin Bower (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 50–51.

47. For an overview of distinctions between abstract and practical musical knowledge, as well as their eventual unification into what we now call music theory, from late antiquity into the Middle Ages, see Calvin M. Bower, "The Transmission of Ancient Music Theory into the Middle Ages," in *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. Thomas Street Christensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 136–67.

becoming mired in the physical experience of the song, thus abandoning the spiritual import and meaning of the word.

The Greek ecclesiast Clement of Alexandria shows how the early church began to associate such embodied attention to song with the pagan performance and practice that preceded the coming of Christ. Writing his *Exhortation to the Greeks* in the latter half of the second century CE, Clement drew from classical Pythagorean notions of the harmonically ordered cosmos to argue (along with Boethius and others) that singing psalms could bring listeners into resonance with cosmic order and harmony or truth. He adapted mythological accounts to Christian purposes in order to draw his pagan audience toward the Christian faith. In doing so, he aimed to correct the pagan tendency to attribute powers of enchantment over the natural world to minstrels rather than God.[48] For Clement and other early Christians, only the "new song," the word of God, could act on nature. This distinction between "old" and "new" song persisted for centuries. As scholars like Zieman have shown, the impulse to juxtapose the new song with the old song of pre-Christian musical forms was pervasive in the later Middle Ages. Zieman underscores how medieval Christians understood the Hebrew reading and singing of psalms before the arrival of Christ to be overly literal in its attention to the material text: the letter rather than the spirit.[49] From this perspective, the old song of pre-Christian minstrels—both Hebrew and pagan—was a form of sound without substance or noise: it acted on the body rather than affecting "true" spiritual knowledge.

It is this perspective that Clement presents when he opens his *Exhortation* by recounting the Greek myth of Eunomus the Locrian and the Pythian grasshopper:

> A solemn assembly of Greeks, held in honour of a dead serpent, was gathering at Pytho, and Eunomus sang a funeral ode for the reptile. Whether his song was a hymn or in praise of the snake, or a lamentation over it, I cannot say: but there was a competition, and Eunomus was playing the lyre in the heat of the day, at the time when the grasshoppers, warmed by the sun, were singing under the leaves along the hills. They were singing, you see, not to the dead serpent of Pytho, but

48. Clement of Alexandria, *The Exhortation to the Greeks*, trans. G. W. Butterworth (London: W. Heinemann, 1919), 3.

49. Katherine Zieman, *Singing the New Song: Literacy and Liturgy in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 40–49. See also Bruce Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture: Hildegard of Bingen to Chaucer* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 32–46.

> to the all-wise God, a spontaneous natural song, better than the measured strains of Eunomus. A string breaks in the Locrian's hands; the grasshopper settles on the neck of the lyre and begins to twitter there as if upon a branch: whereupon the minstrel, by adapting his music to the grasshopper's lay, supplied the place of the missing string. So, it was not Eunomus that drew the grasshopper by his song, as the legend would have it, when it set up the bronze figure at Pytho, showing Eunomus with his lyre, and his ally in the contest. No, the grasshopper flew of its own accord, and sang of its own accord, although the Greeks thought it to have been responsive to music.[50]

Here Clement juxtaposes two modes of song "[in] competition": the music of Eunomus, wrongly directed to the dead serpent-guardian of the pagan shrine of Delphi, and the music of the grasshoppers, directed to the true God.

With this account, Clement offers an early example of two perspectives on song that would come to be important in the Catholic intellectual tradition. From the first perspective, song could be a spontaneous natural eruption in praise of God. As we will see, Rolle adopts a similar esteem for this mode of expression, identifying such outbursts with the affective and emotional engagement of his mystical experience. Indeed, Clement's move to link this natural song to the sounds of insects anticipates Rolle's nightingale persona, underscoring the nonrational, bestial nature of such ecstatic expression. Yet, from the second perspective, song was enchantment, appealing to the base senses and so seducing the animal flesh while the spirit languished. Indeed, Clement concludes the fable wondering, "How in the world is it that you [pagan Greeks] have given credence to worthless legends, imagining brute beasts to be enchanted by music, while the bright face of truth seems alone to strike you as deceptive, and is regarded with unbelieving eyes?"[51]

This fable affords Clement the opportunity to develop the metaphor of God as a minstrel and to contrast the "old song" of pagan minstrels like Eunomus with the "new song": the word of God. For early Christians, this new song had the capacity to affect the soul of its listeners far more powerfully than the old song's pagan enchantment. Clement explains that, like the song of King David, whose music healed Saul of his demonic possession (1 Samuel 16:23), the new song contains a "sweet and genuine medicine of persuasion."[52] Its purpose is "to open the eyes of the blind, to unstop the ears

50. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation*, 3–5.
51. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation*, 5.
52. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation*, 7.

of the deaf, and to lead the halt and erring into the way of righteousness."[53] In doing so, it draws listeners toward truth and into resonance with cosmic order and harmony. As Clement explains, "it is this [new song] which composed the entire creation into melodious order, and tuned into concert the discord of the elements, that the whole universe might be in harmony with it."[54] In this instance, Clement's reference to the new song refers broadly to the biblical word. Yet by comparing it explicitly to the song of David, Clement links the idea of the new song specifically to the psalms of the Hebrew bible, many of which claim to be written by or for King David.

This distinction between physical and emotional engagement with the biblical word makes its way into Latin writing on the psalms as well. In the latter part of the fourth century, at around the same time that Augustine sought to understand mystical silence, his contemporary and fellow theologian Jerome made distinctions among types of song and their uses in devotional practice. His commentary on Ephesians 5:19—"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts"—is particularly instructive. After quickly defining a hymn as a proclamation of God's omnipotence he moves on to distinguish between psalms and spiritual songs. The psalms "pertain to an ethical topic" and so offer moral instruction to singers and listeners "with the instrument of the body."[55] Spiritual song, however, belongs to the singer whose attention and investigation is turned toward "higher subjects": the harmony and order of the universe.[56] In Jerome's summation: "a psalm has reference to the body and a song to the mind." He concludes from this that "we ought, therefore, to sing and make melody and praise the Lord more with our soul than with our voice."[57] Jerome's distinction between physical and spiritual song is consistent with the contemporaneous distinctions of Augustine and others between interior and exterior perception and expression. He repeats this command to turn away from the voice twice more in the subsequent conclusion of this gloss, first emphasizing that one should sing "with the heart

53. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation*, 15.

54. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation*, 11.

55. autem proprie ad ethicum locum pertinent, ut per organum corporis." Ronald E. Heine, trans., *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 228. For the Latin, see J. P. Migne, ed., *PL* (Paris: Migne, 1841–65), 26:528.

56. "Qui vero de superioribus disputat, et concentum mundi omnium creaturarum ordinem atque concordiam subtilis disputator edisserit iste spirituale canticum canit." *PL*, 26:528; Heine, *Commentaries of Origen and Jerome*, 228.

57. "Psalmus ad corpus: canticum refertur ad mentem. Et canere igitur et psallere, et laudare Dominum magis animo quam voce debemus." *PL*, 26:528; Heine, *Commentaries of Origen and Jerome*, 228–29.

(*corde*), not with the voice (*voce*)" and later explaining, "it is not the voice (*vox*) of the singer but the words (*verba*) that are read which are pleasing."[58] By yoking spiritual song with heart and words and by elevating these elements above the *vox*, Jerome subordinates the external physical experience of song to a more internal understanding based in mental understanding and emotional conviction.

Indeed, for Jerome the sounds of the singer are of little importance compared to the singer's intentions and their outcome in good works. He warns that "the throat and pharynx should not be smeared (*colliniendas*) with sweet medicine in the manner of the tragic actors so that theatrical rhythms and songs are heard in the Church."[59] By naming the explicit parts of the anatomy that participate in vocalization Jerome locates artificial or theatrical presentations of music firmly in the body. He maintains the superficiality of such vocalization with the notion that its sweet sounds do not come naturally, but from vocal tracts "smeared" with sweetness. By contrast, Jerome asserts, "although someone may be [*kakophonos*] . . . if he has good works, he is a sweet singer with God."[60] Appearing in the midst of his Latin, Jerome's use of the Greek term *kakophonos* amplifies the aural alterity of such virtuous song. It is not the sounds of the voice that indicate purity of soul and intention, but the speaker's charitable action. Thus, the cacophonic voice of a bad singer with good works is preferable to the theatrical and superficial sweetness of liturgical actors.

Around the same time Jerome wrote his *Commentary on the Ephesians*, Augustine expressed his own concerns about the role of song in the liturgy. In a passage from the *Confessions* on the pleasures of hearing, Augustine notes the tendency of liturgical singing to appeal to the delights of his flesh. Yet he confesses that "at times, immoderately avoiding this falsehood, I err with too much severity, but sometimes I wish greatly that the melody of all sweet little songs, to which David's psalter is repeated, be removed from my ears and those of the church."[61] Here Augustine admits the hastiness of an earlier impulse to eliminate music from the church service. He goes on to

58. "Deo non voce, sed corde cantandum. . . . Non vox canentis, sed verba placeant, quae leguntur." *PL*, 26:528; Heine, *Commentaries of Origen and Jerome*, 229.

59. "Nec in tragoedorum modum guttur et fauces dulci medicamine colliniendas, ut in ecclesia theatrales, moduli audiantur et cantica." *PL*, 26:528; Heine, *Commentaries of Origen and Jerome*, 229.

60. "Quamvis sit aliquis ut sollent illi appellare [*kakophonos*], si bona opera habuerit, dulcis apud Deum cantor est." *PL*, 26:528; Heine, *Commentaries of Origen and Jerome*, 229.

61. "Aliquando autem hanc ipsam fallaciam immoderatius cavens erro nimia severitate, sed valde interdum, ut melos omnes cantilenarum suavium, quibus Daviticum psalterium frequentatur, ab auribus meis removeri velim atque ipsius ecclesiae." Augustine, *Confessions*, 2:166.

recall the tears he shed upon listening to the psalms shortly after his conversion and concludes, "insofar as I am moved not with the song, but with the things sung, when they are sung with a clear voice and most fitting modulation, then I acknowledge the good use of this institution."[62]

Yet the music of the psalms always ran the risk of having just the opposite effect in listeners. Augustine confesses, "when it happens to me that I am moved more with the song than with the thing itself (*res*), I confess that I sin gravely."[63] In Augustine's view, Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, offered the best model because he "made the reader of the psalms sound forth with such restrained inflection of the voice that it was nearer to speaking than to singing."[64] For Augustine, as for Jerome, the biblical content or essence of the song was of primary importance. The sounds of the song should be appropriate and subordinate to the *res*: the substance of what was sung.

In this treatment of liturgical song, Augustine's ambivalence is writ large as he "float[s] between the peril of sensual delight and an experience of more salubrious benefit."[65] Indeed, his writings are somewhat inconsistent on the subject of song and its corporeal pleasures. Though he often expresses deep suspicion of the physical senses, at times he acknowledges that they offer pathways to move or affect the soul toward goodness or spiritual truth. In his commentary on the psalms, for example, Augustine praises the liturgical *jubilus*, a musical technique in which a single syllable was stretched over numerous notes, for its capacity to channel the voice of the soul:

> One who jubilates does not speak words, but it [the *jubilus*] is a certain sound (*sonus*) of joy without words (*uerbis*); for the voice of the soul is poured out in joy, as much as it is able, in the experience of feeling (*experimentis affectum*), not in the comprehension of sense (*sensum comprehendentis*). A man joying in his exultation, from certain words that are unable to be spoken or understood, bursts forth in a certain voice of exultation without words, so that it seems that he does indeed

62. "Quod moveor non cantu, sed rebus quae cantantur, cum liquida voce et convenientissima modulatione cantantur, magnam instituti huius utilitatem rursus agnosco." Augustine, *Confessions*, 2:166

63. "Tamen cum mihi accidit, ut me amplius cantus quam res, quae canitur moveat, poenaliter me pecarre Confiteor." Augustine, *Confessions*, 2:168.

64. "Qui tam modico flexu vocis faciebat sonare lectorem psalmi, ut pronuntianti vicinior esset quam canenti." Augustine, *Confessions*, 2:166.

65. "Ita fluctuo inter periculum voluptatis et experimentum salubritatis magisque." Augustine, *Confessions*, 2:166–68.

> rejoice with his own voice, but, as if filled with too much joy, he cannot put into words what it is in which he rejoices.[66]

Invoking the ineffability topos so common to medieval mystical writing, Augustine asserts the importance of an extrasemantic experience of language. It is the "experience of feeling," not the "comprehension of sense," that conveys spiritual understanding most effectively. Here, in another form, is the tension we have already begun to see in Augustine's writing: it is ecstatic sound, not words, that expresses true knowledge of God. An extrasemantic experience of sound is akin to an experience of silence. As scholars like Gehl and Bruce have shown, this conceptual framework undergirded monastic ideals of silence, which did not necessarily involve the total absence of sound. In a quieter counterpart to Augustine's *jubilus*, for example, the practice of *ruminatio*—often called monastic mumbling—encouraged monks and even pious laymen to continuously recite psalms so that they seemed to chew upon the holy words.[67] Such noisy subvocalization allowed them to digest spiritual knowledge, to physically incorporate it into their minds and bodies.

In the passage above, Augustine's chiasmic aural ornamentation in the phrase "experimentis affectum, non sensum comprehendentis" entwines the concepts of feeling (*affectum*) and sense (*sensum*), underscoring his point that the experience of language is the true locus of spiritual understanding. It is important to note that in this example, Augustine's aural ornamentation enhances what is for him spiritually righteous textual meaning. Elsewhere, he stresses that such ornamentation without a proper foundation in spiritual truth is dangerous. In his influential manual on the interpretation and teaching of scripture, *On Christian Doctrine*, for example, Augustine describes pagan poetry with the assertion that "within its pleasing covering, this husk

66. "Qui jubilat non uerba dicit, sed sonus quidam est laetitiae sine uerbis; uox est enim animi diffuse laetitia, quantum potest, experimentis affectum, non sensum comprehendentis. Gaudens homo in exsultationis sua, ex uerbis quibusdam quae non possunt dici et intellegi, erumpit in uocem quamdam exultationes sine uerbis; ita ut appareat eum in ipsa uoce gaudere quidem, sed quasi repletum nimio gaudio, non posse uerbis explicare quod gaudet." Augustine, *Enarrationes in psalmos*, ed. J. Leemans and L. Jocqué, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 38–40 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1956), 2:1394. Translation is mine, though I am guided by that of Bruce Holsinger in *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture*, 76.

67. In a particularly striking example, Scott G. Bruce shows how this practice was available to pious laymen as a means of self-elevation to the realm of angels. Bruce recounts how when the abbot Odo of Cluny heard the pious count Gerald Aurillac intoning the psalms, Odo remarked that he "utter[ed] no human sound" (nil mortale sonans). The phrase is borrowed from a passage describing the oracle at Delphi speaking with the voice of Apollo in Virgil's *Aeneid* (VI 49–51), linking otherworldly sounds of numinous *ruminatio* to the sententious noise of pagan oracles in a Christian effort to repurpose pagan mythology. Cited in Bruce, *Silence and Sign Language in Medieval Monasticism*, 23.

rattles (*quatit*) sonorous little gems; but it is the nourishment of pigs, not of men."[68] In Augustine's formulation, poetry's "husk"—its superficial somatic aspects—were nothing but an empty "rattle," sounding beautiful, but remaining without spiritual virtue. Ultimately, he emphasizes how the pleasing sensual experience of language can overtake meaning, or in the case of pagan poetry, obscure a void in spiritual truth. Augustine's formulation indicates the potential dangers of aural ornamentation and texture as well as the pleasures it afforded. When such superficial aural pleasures obscured or were at odds with the interior moral essence of a text, language itself could become nothing more than a rattle.

Echoic Mysticism

The experience of sound for its extrasemantic properties proves counterintuitively to be an integral element of the mystical program that Rolle developed out of and in partial opposition to the institutional church. As we have seen, stillness and silence are necessary to achieve the sensations of *calor*, *dulcor*, and *canor*. Yet the end result of such experience is not entirely quiet. Rolle explains, "There are many who always offer their prayers to God in great devotion and delight who are able to taste the sweetness of contemplation by praying or meditating, who do not move on, but remain in quiet."[69] For Rolle, in fact, the end goal of contemplation is a complete immersion of the senses into heavenly sound, which resists being contained in language. Despite Rolle's repeated assertions that his mystical experience stems from a divine source, he nevertheless emphasizes that his experience of it is ardently physical. The concept of noise emerges as a means of emphasizing the material, sensory nature of this experience.

Rolle's autobiographical recollection of his first mystical experience of *canor* links his affective devotional program with the experience and the expression of noise, emerging in tandem and in interplay. He recalls:

> Truly, while I sat in that same chapel, and in the night, before supper, repeated the psalms as best I could, I perceived, as it were, the noise (*tinnitum*) of psalm-chanters (*psallencium*), or rather, of singers

68. "Haec siliqua intra dulce tectorium sonantes lapillus quatit; non est autem hominum sed porcorum cibus." See Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, ed. and trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 144. Translation is mine, in consultation with Green's facing-page translation.

69. "Multi sunt quippe qui sepe in magna deuocione et suauitate preces suas Deo offerunt et dulcedinem contemplacionis orando uel meditando degustare possunt, qui non discurrunt sed manent in quiete" (177).

> (*canencium*) above me. And while I set my intention to praying to heavenly beings with all my desire, I cannot explain how, I soon sensed in me a concord of song, and received a most delectable heavenly harmony, remaining with me in mind. For my thoughts were continually changed into the song of songs, and I had odes as if by meditating, and in those same prayers and psalm-chanting I uttered the same sound. Thenceforth, singing what previously I had spoken, out of a profusion of inner sweetness, I burst forth but in a hidden way, because [I was] only in the presence of my Maker.[70]

It is clear from this passage that, for Rolle, the height of mystical experience is emphatically aural. Before realizing that the heavenly sounds are made by angelic "singers," Rolle initially mistakes the sounds of *canor* for the "noise" or ringing of "psalm-chanters," a detail that has never been satisfactorily explained. Scholars like Albin and Zieman read this juxtaposition of choral communities as a rhetorical move that reinforces the distinction between earthly and heavenly song and, in Albin's words, "effectively removes human psalmody from the realm of the songful [*canor*]."[71] But I would suggest that Rolle's distinction is not quite so clear-cut. Grammatically, the word *tinnitum* governs both genitives: *psallencium* ("of psalm-chanters") and *canencium* ("of singers"). The distinction between heavenly and earthly music lies instead in the difference between psalm-chanting and singing. While Rolle *does* distinguish between human psalmody and divine singers, he experiences both not as language, but as *tinnitum*: a sound alone.

This overlap amplifies at once the ineffability and the sensual physicality of Rolle's experience. As Zieman writes, overlooking the significance of noise to Rolle's rhetorical framework, "the choral presence [of *canor*] . . . mediates a particular experience of the sacred that initiates conversion by means other than the grammatical content of the song."[72] Zieman's reading stresses that Rolle's experience of heavenly *canor* resists comprehension at the semantic level. Here I call attention to the embodied nature of that

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70. "Dum enim in eadem capella sederem, et in nocte ante cenam psalmos prout potui decantarem, quasi tinnitum psallencium uel pocius canencium supra me ascultaui. Cumque celestibus eciam orando toto desiderio intenderem, nescio quomodo mox in me concentum canorum sensi, et delectabilissimam armoniam celicus excepi, mecum manentem in mente. Nam cogitacio mea continuo in carmen canorum commutabatur, et quasi odas habui meditando, et eciam oracionibus ipsis et psalmodia eundem sonum edidi. Deinceps usque ad canendum que prius dixeram, pre affluencia suauitatis interne porupi, occulte quidem, quia tantummodo coram Conditore meo" (189).

71. Albin, "Listening for *Canor*," 181. Zieman concurs that this passage emphasizes the absolute difference between heavenly and earthly sound. See Zieman, "Perils of *Canor*," 144.

72. Zieman, "Perils of *Canor*," 140.

understanding. In classical poetic and post-Augustinian prose, *tinnitum* carried connotations of loud or harsh resounding, usually of metal.[73] Variants of the word *tinniens* referred to the act of ringing bells (*tinnire*, *tinnitio*) and to the bells themselves. In his late fourteenth-century translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus's *On the Properties of Things*, John Trevisa describes the *tintinabulum* as "a [litil] bell or campernole, and haþ þe name of 'tinniendo,' 'tynclynge' or 'ryngynge.'"[74] These *tintinnabuli* had a complex function in medieval religious literature and culture. Historians of medieval sound have drawn from archaeological and textual evidence to suggest that the term *tintinnabulum* referred not to a large cast or wrought church bell that resounded across distance, but to smaller crotal bells (somewhat similar to contemporary jingle bells).[75] The word appears in some accounts of medieval bells as *signae* or "signs," underscoring the significance of their sounds, calling the faithful to worship, for example. In addition to serving a purpose, however, *tintinnabuli* were also used as ornamental bells. A particularly compelling example from the Latin Vulgate specifies the hem of Aaron's holy tunic with a description of embroidered pomegranates "with little bells set between" (mistis in medio tintinnabulis).[76] Rolle does not equate the sounds of heavenly *canor* directly with this instrument. Indeed, the sound of Rolle's *tinnitum* is far more powerful than that of *tintinnabuli*, as the diminutive form of the latter makes clear. But by evoking an instrument with an ornamental role as well as a signifying role, Rolle emphasizes that his initial experience of *canor* is grounded in aesthetic experience: a sensory encounter of the biblical word.

Rolle's reference to *tinnitum* at this moment also points to his desire to distance himself from the institutional church.[77] Another variant of the word

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73. See R. E. Latham, ed., *The Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* (London: Clarendon Press, 1975), s.v. "tinnitus."

74. Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things*, 2:1393.

75. John H. Arnold and Caroline Goodson, "Resounding Community: The History and Meaning of Medieval Church Bells," *Viator* 43, no. 1 (2012): 107.

76. Exodus 28:33. See Ziolkowski, *The Vulgate Bible*, 1:426–27.

77. Indeed, Rolle's evocation of bells here may be an early example of an impulse among the laity to reclaim the sounds of bells in opposition to church authority. Given their role in calling the faithful to worship, church bells had strong associations with piety and spiritual obedience, as the work of Arnold and Goodson ("Resounding Community") makes clear. Yet bells emerge at a number of moments in late medieval English texts as a figurative means for the laity to disrupt monolithic expressions of ecclesiastical authority, suggesting an overall shift in their significance from denoting obedience to signaling disruption. For further discussion, see Adin E. Lears, "On Bells and Rebellion: The Auditory Imagination and Social Reform, Medieval and Modern," in *Vernacular Aesthetics in the Later Middle Ages: Politics, Performativity, and Reception from Literature to Music*, ed. Katharine Jager (New York: Palgrave, 2019).

tinniens appears in the Vulgate's 1 Corinthians 13:1: "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have charity, I have become like sounding brass (*aes sonans*) or clanging cymbal (*cymbalum tinniens*)."[78] Here *tinnitum* is presented with *sonus* as a metaphor for empty speech that lacks the emotional substance of an intention toward charity and so amounts to sound alone or noise. Though in his later work, the *Melos Amoris*, Rolle is at pains to assert that charity or love is the source of *calor*, *dulcor*, and *canor*, here his initial perception of *canor* as noise stresses his primarily bodily engagement with it.[79] Rolle's emphasis on the physicality of his experience of *canor* is a means of underscoring its noninstitutional nature. As Zieman notes, this account of his first experience of *canor* amounts to a reversal of the miraculous injunction "tolle, lege, tolle, lege" recounted by Augustine in book 8 of the *Confessions*.[80] Rather than taking up the bible and reading, Rolle sets it down and listens.

Here, Rolle conveys the corporeality of this experience of language to readers with the alliterative phrase "*c*ogitacio mea *c*ontinuo in *c*armen *c*anorum *c*ommutabatur," a moment whose soundplay chimes with the passage above, which outlines the world's fraudulent pleasures. Yet if that passage uses aural ornamentation to underscore the dangerous physicality of the lying world (*gementem gemmam*, *laudem ludibrium*, etc.), in this one Rolle's soundplay emphasizes the physical materiality of language in order to convey a knowledge that lies beyond language. Scholars have debated the extent to which the stylistic flourishes like these work to represent or imitate *canor*.[81] Watson argues that the *Incendium* demonstrates that "*experientia* can become the basis for *auctoritas* . . . above all because of [Rolle's] ability to recreate [the experience of *canor*] verbally."[82] While Watson's focus on experience here is crucial to understanding Rolle's style, framing the mystic's efforts in terms of a "recreation" or representation of *canor* seems inadequate given Rolle's insistence that *canor* resists representation. Rather than understanding his highly wrought literary style in terms of its representation of *canor*, I want

78. Ziolkowski, *The Vulgate Bible*, 6:914.

79. Richard Rolle, *The Melos Amoris of Richard Rolle of Hampole*, ed. E. J. F. Arnould (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957).

80. Zieman, "Perils of *Canor*," 140.

81. Zieman argues that Rolle's use of alliteration indicates his interest in the "extragrammatical" elements of language and that "this excess was, furthermore, often represented with alliteration." Zieman, "Perils of *Canor*," 137. In response to this strand of criticism, in "Listening for *Canor*," Albin instructively points out that Rolle's repeated insistence that his experience of *canor* does not take place in the imagination situates the function of *canor* outside systems of representation. Instead, he argues that Rolle's persistent and sometimes insistently overwrought use of alliteration is a means of calling attention to the inadequacy of his own voice in relation to heavenly melody.

82. Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*, 140.

to shift the terms of the debate to examine the ways that Rolle's language invites an experience of *canor* by pushing the reader's perception of language into the realm of sound alone so that clamor and song coexist in alliteration and other poetic elements. Watson goes on to argue that Rolle's rhetorical finesse, in particular his use of alliteration, becomes a stylistic principle in his later work, the *Melos Amoris*: a "kaleidoscope," in which Rolle's style is "part . . . of a luminous shifting pattern whose strange beauty holds ear and eye even while the mind slides off into confusion."[83] This description is apt, indicating how Rolle's style invites readers to experience language as noise. With this stylistic principle Rolle turns away from a narrowly utilitarian use of language to convey meaning, favored in didactic and homiletic literature. Instead, he cultivates an alternate mode of experiential understanding prevalent among the laity, akin to what Joyce Coleman terms "aural literacy."[84]

Yet if, as Albin has argued, music is the element of *canor* that Rolle most prized, I would argue that it was an experiential and lay understanding of such music that Rolle was keen to emphasize. As Albin argues, the affective importance of Rolle's aural experience was indeed deeply important to his theology, as well as his devotional program, and amplifies the crucial place of music in late medieval English devotion. But it is equally important to note how Rolle invites us to understand this experience in terms of noise rather than music. This distinction, moreover, underscores the lay nature of his mystical program. In fact, Rolle's treatment of *canor* bears very little resemblance to the articulations of "true" musical knowledge that were outlined by Boethius and other medieval theorists of music, which distinguished between true musical knowledge (grounded in the rational judgment of music's mathematical proportions and structure), practical knowledge (based in bodily repetition and muscle memory), and something like affective musical knowledge: those (including poets) "who are turned to song not as much by speculation and reason as by a certain natural instinct."[85] Rolle presents his knowledge of heavenly *canor* as one of a poet rather than what Boethius would term a true musician.

In describing the mystical reception of heavenly song, Rolle repeatedly refers to *canor* as *sonus*: a word that indicates his understanding of the

83. Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*, 172.

84. Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

85. "Secundum vero musicam agentium genus poetarum est, quod non potius speculation ac ratione, quam naturali quodam instinctu fertur ad carmen." See Boethius, *De institutione musica*, 223–25.

experience as something other than music.[86] In a particularly salient example, Rolle explains:

> He [the mystic] accepts in himself a sound (*sonum*), sent from the supernal realm, and his *meditation is modified into melody, and his mind maintains in marvelous* harmony.
>
> It is indeed angelic sweetness that he accepts into his soul, and at the same time odes (*oda*), although his praises will not be resounded to God with those same words. As is that [singing] of the angels, so is [the mystic's] singing, although not as much, nor as clear, because of the corruptible *flesh* (*carnem*) that still weighs down the lover: he who has experienced (*expertitur*) this is an expert (*expertus*) in this same angelic song (*cantica*), because [they are] of the same kind: in the homeland [i.e. heaven] and on the way to it. The sound (*sonus*) pertains to angelic song (*canticum*), not to the *song* (*carmen*) that is chanted.[87]

Conceptually and thematically speaking, this passage begins to articulate a theory of echoic mysticism: the mystic perceives heavenly *canor* as a layperson, through the body, understanding it as sound alone. Albin writes of this process that "the mystical body becomes a kind of spiritual soundbox that gives back the sounds it receives, its living structures warming and brightening angelic music with human timbre."[88] Formally speaking, Rolle's alliteration ("et meditacio mutabitur in melos," etc.) offers the very "human timbre" that renders the mystic's expression into sound alone. Thus, Rolle's mystical expression re-sounds or echoes back divine *canor* in a way made imperfect and inarticulate by the influence of the flesh, even as it offers another, more experiential form of knowledge—one that is both more direct and capacious in its appeal to physical and emotional feeling.

Indeed, Rolle employs this material manipulation of language as a means of conveying such experiential knowledge through other wordplay as well. In this passage, Rolle struggles to define heavenly *sonus* in relation to a range

86. In addition to the passage that follows, see Rolle's assertion that *canor* is "an infusion and perception of heavenly or spiritual sound (*soni*), which pertains to the song of eternal praise and to the sweetness of invisible melody" (189).

87. "[S]onum accipet in se ex supernis inmissum, et *meditacio mutabitur in melos, mensque in mirifica morabitur* armonia. Est enim angelica suauitas quam in animam accipit et eadem oda, etsi non eisdem uerbis laudes Deo resonabitur. Qualis angelorum, talis est iscius concentus, etsi non tantus, nec tam perspicuus, propter *carnem* corruptibilem que adhuc aggrauat amantem: qui hoc experitur eciam angelica cantica expertus est cum eiusdem speciei: in uia est, et in patria. Sonus enim ad canticum pertinet, non ad *carmen* quod cantatur" (237, emphasis added).

88. Albin, "Listening for *Canor*," 182.

of musical terminology, distinguishing between heavenly song (*oda*, *canticum*) and the song uttered by the mystic (*carmen*). The mystic's *carmen* is of a kind with angelic *canticum*, though inferior because it takes place on the corruptible earthly plane, the world of the body and its senses. The passage plays subtly with the sounds of *carmen* (human song) and *carnem* (flesh), tying the concepts together in a moment of tongue-tying confusion that stresses the role of the body as an impediment to clear understanding, but also as a locus for a different form of felt knowledge. For Rolle, the mystic's knowledge of the song is based in physical experience: he has experienced and is an expert in it.

This experiential knowledge is therefore not rational but affective and material. Rolle writes that he feels within him "an unaccustomed and pleasing (*iocundum*) heat" building up to his first experience of *canor* (189). Stemming from the verb *iocor*, meaning "to joke," the term *iocundus* carried connotations of lay entertainment and minstrelsy. The passage recalls an earlier discussion of laughter in the *Incendium*, in which Rolle seeks to elevate the notion of spiritual mirth, explaining, "Some people condemn laughter, some praise it. Laughter that stems from lightness and vanity of the mind is condemnable; that which stems truly from cheerfulness of conscience and joy of spirit is praiseworthy; that one alone is righteous and it is called the mirth and delectation of God."[89] Like Augustine's *gaudium*, the warming spiritual *iocunditas* that leads Rolle to *canor* is righteous, not ribald.[90] Yet by using a term with links to worldly entertainment and the physiological response of laughter, Rolle amplifies its bodily pleasure and lay nature.

Rolle's righteous *risus* emerges as a spontaneous form of emotional utterance, a nonlinguistic byproduct of the affective spiritual knowledge achieved in mystical experience. Such exclamatory utterance bears some resemblance to the mystical song that erupts within the mystic. Rolle writes that "because he shall praise God in jubilant song, he bursts forth (*eructat*) praise to God from his most secret vitals, and his sweet-sounding (*dulcissona*) voice arrives at the heavens, how the divine majesty delights to hear it."[91] For Rolle, the mystic's praise "bursts forth," a verb that implies the immersive outpouring of a voice that sounds aloud with a noise that is meaningful in its

89. "Porro risum quidam reprobant, quidam laudant. Risus igitur qui ex leuitate et uanitate mentis, reprobabilis est: qui uero est ex hilaritate consciencie et leticia spirituali, laudabilis est, qui solum in iustis est, et dicitur iocunditas in dileccione Dei" (170).

90. For more on proscriptions on laughter in medieval monastic and eremitical traditions, see Bruce, *Silence and Sign Language in Medieval Monasticism*, 32–33.

91. "Quia Deum in canora iubilacione laudabit, laudem enim Dei ex intimis precordiis eructat, et uox eius dulcissona in excelsis usque peruenit, quam audire delectatur maiestas diuina" (238).

"sweet-sounding" quality. The pleasurable *iocunditas* of this experience, Rolle notes, distinguishes it from the mystical gift of tears much promoted among those "doctors" who argue that the perfect ought to weep "as much for the miseries of life as for the delay of their homeland [i.e. heaven]." By contrast, Rolle's songful outbursts stem from a "marvelous languor" that "flows out to God."[92] For Rolle, mystical expression resists containment in language, dwelling instead in the realm of inarticulacy and noise.

If laughter is one form this mystical expression may take, stammering is another. When *canor* springs to his lips, Rolle explains, "he will become more slow of the tongue. Because the abundance of his inner joy and the singular sonority of his song impose delay, so that what previously occupied him not more than an hour, he will now hardly be able to implement in half a day."[93] This elongation contributes to the faltering quality of the mystic's voice, what Rolle later calls his "stuttering" (balbuciens), which can only articulate the ineffability of *canor* with a language that inhibits correct articulation, extending sounds beyond the boundaries of syllables (268) in a way that anticipates William Langland's poetics of lolling. If such inarticulacy is a crucial element of Rolle's mysticism, it may begin to explain another authorial persona he cultivates over the course of his writing career. We have seen how Rolle identifies as the nightingale in a gesture that points to the nonrational and material qualities of its song. Similarly, in the *Melos Amoris*, whose later composition is widely accepted among scholars, Rolle identifies himself as "youthful" (iuvenculus).[94] Wolfgang Riehle has suggested that this discrepancy indicates that Rolle composed the *Melos* at different times.[95] I would argue, however, that Rolle makes rhetorical use of the connotations of nonrational physicality attached both to animals and to children in order to stress the affective and corporeal nature of his mystical program.

Rolle frames his spontaneous and songful mystical expression as a laugh, as a stutter, and most often as *clamor*: a shout or wail. The importance of the term *clamor* to Rolle's mystical lexicon has gone largely unacknowledged. Zieman makes passing reference to it discussing a passage in which

92. "Cumque doctors nostri asserant perfectos debere lacrimari, et quo perfecciores sunt, eo in fletibus sunt uberiores, tam pro miseriis uie quam pro dilacione patrie. Mihi quidem langor mirabilis in diuino amore affluit; et compunccio fletuum corporalium pro interne suauitatis magnitudine cessauit" (270).

93. "Fie[t] impedicioris lingue. Quoniam pre habundancia interni gaudii et sonoritate singulari pneumatizando moram faciens, quod prius ipsum non nisi per unius hore spacium occupabat: iam sepe per dimidiam diem uix implebit" (237).

94. Rolle, *Melos Amoris*, 9.34.

95. Riehle, *The Secret Within*, 121.

Rolle asserts that the mystic "cannot bear the noise (*clamor*) of psalmody unless his inner song (*canor*) can be made to reflect it." She notes that Rolle distinguishes the *canor* of the angelic choir within him from the *clamor* of psalmody sung by the church choir as a means of asserting the individual nature of his devotional practice, a gesture of independence from the choral community and the institution it represented. In making this claim, she writes, "[Rolle's] wordplay on *canor*/*clamor* . . . intimates that reading and singing in this world is at best a dim and imperfect reflection of *canor*'s celestial source."[96] It is undeniable that this description fits with many others that label the sensations of the material and physical world as noise. Yet this reading overlooks the other times Rolle uses the same wordplay on the phonemic cousins *clamor* and *canor*, in reference to his own expression of mystical song.

The noise of *clamor* is an integral element of Rolle's echoic mysticism, as is clear when Rolle asserts that clamor expresses the wisdom that comes from mystical knowledge. In the perfect lover of God,

> wisdom is derived from a secret place and her delights to be with lovers of eternity because she is not found on earth living softly; she remains in him of whom I previously spoke [the perfect lover of God], because he melts totally in his love of Christ, and all things inside him shout for God. *This shout is the love of the song*, because he raises his great voice up to the ears of God: it is both the desire for good and the affection for virtue. His shout is extraworldly, because his mind desires nothing except Christ.[97]

The affective feelings and sensations resulting from divine *canor* cause the mystic to reach back toward God with a divine shout (*clamor*), an utterance whose nonsemantic content befits the preconscious knowledge it expresses. At the heart of this passage is Rolle's assertion that "Clamor iste amor est canorus": the shout is the love of the song. This phrase is echoed nearly exactly in a subsequent passage describing mystical clamor, when Rolle asserts "clamor iste canor est": the "shout is the song" (243). These phrases are at once perfectly clear and virtuosic in their tongue-tying soundplay. They concisely express Rolle's notion of *canor* even as the sounds of the words refract off of

96. "Si non ualeat sustinere clamorem psallencium nisi canor eius interior ad cogitatum redigatur" (238). The translation is Zieman's. See "Perils of *Canor*," 142.

97. "Trahitur enim sapientia ex occultis, et delicie sue esse cum amatoribus eternitatis, quia non inuenitur in terra suauiter uiuencium; manet autem in eo de quo predixi, quia totus in amore Christi liquescit, et omnia interiora eius ad Deum clamant. *Clamor iste amor est canorus*, quia magnam uocem eleuat usque ad aures Dei: est et desiderium boni, affeccioque uirtutis. Clamor eius extra mundum est, quia mens eius nihil preter Christum concupiscit" (238, emphasis added).

one another, creating moments when the bodily materiality of the language impedes singularity of expression, enacting the exuberant inarticulacy that Rolle links to mystical experience. Rolle's clamorous invocation of *canor* is imperfect because it is filtered and echoed through his own flesh—song and noise coexist in the same aural experience—but that very flesh is what makes it possible for him to approach ultimate knowledge of God.

Singing and Sighing in Rolle's English Lyrics

Rolle extends his notion of echoic mysticism from his Latin *Incendium* into his pastoral writing in English. Like his *Incendium*, and other Latin works, his vernacular writing shows an impulse to reject the physical world and the sensations of the flesh. As in the *Incendium*, Rolle favors the cultivation of *canor* as a silent but nevertheless physical experience of the somatic elements of language. Much of this writing incorporates lyrical interludes with instructions for how to use such work toward spiritual meditation. In his *Ego Dormio*, for example, he instructs his female readers to "think of[t] þis of his [Christ's] passione":

> My kynge þe watyre grete and þe blod he swete;
> Sethen ful sore bet, so þat his blood hym wette,
> Whan har scourges met.
> Ful fast þay can hym dinge, and at þe piller swynge,
> His [faire] face fouled with spetynge.
> The þorne crowneth þe kynge; ful sore is þat prickynge.
> Alas my ioy and my swetynge is d[em]ed for to henge.
> . . . . . .
> Ihesu, my soule þou mend; þi loue in to me send,
> Þat I may with þe lend in ioy withouten end.
> . . . . . .
> Thou make my soule clere, for loue þat chaungeth chere.
> How longe shal I be here? When may I cum þe nere
> Thi melody for to hire?
> Of loue to hyre þe songe þat is lestynge so longe?
> Wil thou be my louynge, þat I þi loue may synge?[98]

The lyric moves from vision to hearing, beginning with familiar images of Christ's crucifixion—his bloodied body and face befouled with spitting—then

98. Rolle, *Prose and Verse*, 30–31.

proceeds to a first-person yearning toward a union with Christ expressed as "hir[ing]" his melody. This melody, we may infer, is *canor*, an aural experience that Rolle has associated with an experience of language as noise: one attuned to the physical process and feelings of listening rather than its end result, comprehension. Indeed, the lyric's stylistic features reinforce this emphasis on experiential listening. Its sound patterning, in this case a series of rhyme sequences across two to four lines rather than alliteration, frustrates the image-making capacity of language, moving away from representation in favor of aural experience.

To cultivate an interior attunement with *canor* in his acolytes, Rolle instructs them to meditate with this form of interior noise, emphasizing that with time and practice, this will lead to the highest degree of spiritual devotion. Rolle explains, regarding the lyric above: "If þou wil þynke þis euery day, þou shalt fynd gret swetnesse, þat shal draw þi hert vp, and mak þe fal in wepynge and in grete langynge to Ihesu; and þi þought shal be reft abouen al erthly þynges, abouen þe sky and þe sterres, so þat þe egh of þi hert may loke in to heuyn."[99] In his account of his own mystical experience, Rolle takes in *canor* as *tinnitum* and echoes it back as *clamor*. Under his prescribed conditions, his devoted followers should cultivate an experience of *canor* as noise and echo back this noise with a loud voice. Here Rolle's vernacular equivalent for *clamor*—the spontaneous emotional expression of the mystic's experience—is "wepynge." With its connotations of "sob[bing] *aloud*" as well as crying tears, the verb had much more explicit links to aurality in Middle English than it does in Modern English.[100] For Rolle's disciples, as for Rolle himself, the shout is the song.

In other lyrics, Rolle comes to develop a fuller vernacular approximation of the phrase "clamor iste canor est" with the refrain "singing and sighing."[101] As with the verb *wepen*, the Middle English verb *sighen* implied a more intense and loud aural expression in Middle English than it does in Modern English.[102] Indeed, the verb *sighen* was often paired with *sobben*, underscoring its connotations of vocalized moaning and wailing as well as unvoiced suspiration. The final lyric from *Ego Dormio* begins:

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99. Rolle, *Prose and Verse*, 31.

100. See *MED*, s.v. "wepen," https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary.

101. The refrain of "singing and sighing" occurs in at least one lyric unattributed to Rolle, attesting to the potentially more widespread purchase of "singing and sighing" as a form of Rollean echoic mysticism. A Passion meditation from London, British Library, MS Harley 2253 begins "I syke when Y singe / for sorewe that Y se."

102. See *MED*, s.v. "sighen," https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary.

My songe is in seghynge. My lif is in langynge,
Til I þe se, my kynge, so faire in þi shynynge.
So faire in þi fairhede, in to þi light me lede,
And in þi loue me fede; in loue make me spede,
That þou be euer my mede.[103]

Here the combination of singing and sighing functions as a formulaic expression of love-longing for God as a lover, an appropriation of romance topoi and language of melancholy that is consistent with Rolle's affective devotional program. Indeed, in a compelling point of resonance with Rolle's lyric, the combination of singing and sighing makes its way into a mid-fourteenth-century alliterative romance from the southwest Midlands, *William of Palerne*. The romance's protagonist describes the physiology of his lovesickness for his lady:

"I wise," seide William, "I wol it nouȝt layne,
Sum-time it hentis me wiþ hete as hote as ani fure,
But quicliche so kene a cold comes þer-after
Sum time i siȝh & singe samen to-geder."[104]

Like Rolle's clamorous expression of *calor*, *dulcor*, and *canor*, here singing and sighing comes after a period of internal heat as a spontaneous emotional expression of a melancholic lover. This resonance with romance tropes reinforces the worldly physicality of Rolle's form of mysticism, underscoring the inarticulacy associated with such affective intensity.

Perhaps more pointedly, the refrained pairing of "singing and sighing" evokes the tradition of lyric Marian lament, which draws on romance tropes and language in order to express a visceral love-longing for Christ. In such laments, a narrator observes and identifies with the Virgin singing and sighing at the crucifixion of Christ.[105] The lyric known as "I syke when Y singe,"

103. Rolle, *Prose and Verse*, 32. Another lyric attributed to Rolle begins "I sigh and sob both day and nyght for on so faire of hewe. / Ther is no thynge my hert may light, bot loue þat euer is newe." See lyric iii in Rolle, *Prose and Verse*, 45.

104. William of Palerne, *The Romance of William of Palerne*, ed. Walter Skeat (London: EETS, 1867), ll. 906–9.

105. For more on these networks of identification in the tradition of Marian lament, particularly as such identification is implicated with desire, see Kathy Lavezzo, "Sobs and Sighs between Women: The Homoerotics of Compassion in *The Book of Margery Kempe*," in *Premodern Sexualities*, ed. Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero (New York: Routledge, 1996), 175–98.

which was likely transcribed in London, British Library, MS Harley 2253 sometime in the second quarter of the fourteenth century, begins:

I syke when Y singe
For sorewe that Y se,
When Y, with wypinge,
Biholde upon the tre
Ant se Jesu the suete:
Is herte blod forlete
For the love of me;
Ys woundes waxen wete;
Thei wepen, stille ant mete.
Marie, reweth the.[106]

It would be hard to pinpoint exact lines of influence between Rolle and the tradition of Marian lament. What is clear, however, is that the resonance between such lyrics, with their networks of feminine identification, and Rolle's spiritual program demonstrates a certain impulse to, in Sarah McNamer's formulation, "feel like a woman."[107] And varieties of noise—including clamor, sobs, and sighs—are a crucial element of that feeling and its expression. Poetically, these refrains incite the reader to experience language as noise, amplifying an interplay of *canor* and *clamor* by entwining the rhythm offered by alliteration with breathily repeated "s"-sounds. The sibilant sigh of the language, given an alliterative rhythm, becomes a song, yoking *canor* and *clamor* together.

Rolle's ideas prompted debate about appropriate forms of religiosity for decades after his death. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, anonymously authored in the late fourteenth century, ties Rolle's mysticism to such naïve devotion, explaining that the amature's "outrageous" feelings of the body come to be mistaken for "þe fiir of loue," a phrase thought to find its source in Rolle's *Incendium*.[108] Yet even as Rolle's ideas provoked concern and warnings among his near contemporaries, they also influenced innovations in religious

106. Susanna Fein, ed. and trans., *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2014), 2:270. For the approximate date, see Susanna Fein, introduction to *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, 1:2. For an earlier edition see G. L. Brook, ed., *The Harley Lyrics: The Middle English Lyrics of Harley 2253* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), 59.

107. McNamer, *Affective Meditation*.

108. Phyllis Hodgson, ed., *The Cloud of Unknowing* (London: EETS, 1944), 85. For a discussion of the *Cloud*-author's response to Rolle, see Roger Ellis and Samuel Fanous, "1349–1412: Texts," in Fanous and Gillespie, *Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism*, 151.

devotion and expression. By the turn of the fifteenth century, his notion of echoic mysticism—including his contemplative and stylistic notions of *canor*—had reached an East Anglian housewife and artisan from Bishop's Lynn who read his work or, more likely, listened to it read. Margery Kempe, who alludes to the fire of love in her own account of mystical experience, translates Rolle's echoic mysticism into her own idiom, performing it far and wide to townsfolk, pilgrims, and clerics alike in order to make a case for her own spiritual authority and privileged access to God. Her raucous interpretation of Rolle, which literalized and amplified his notion of mystical *clamor*, earned mixed reactions.

Chapter 2

"Nota de Clamore"

Echoic Mysticism and Margery Kempe's Clamorous Style

> A black crack of noise in the street here, alack, bawled back.
>
> —James Joyce, *Ulysses*, "Oxen of the Sun" (323)

At the moment of Margery Kempe's "fyrst cry þat euyr sche cryed in any contemplacyon," a fifteenth-century annotator has added "nota de clamor[e]" in the margin (figure 1).[1] One of the earliest editors of Kempe's *Book*, Hope Emily Allen, observes that this marginal comment recalls Richard Rolle's description of his own tumultuous expression of divine love: "clamor iste canor est."[2]

In Allen's view, the annotation shows how this reader, now labeled by scholars as "Little Brown" because of the appearance of his handwriting, misunderstands Rolle and reads in Margery Kempe's tears and wails the possibility that Rolle's clamor is literal and physical rather than metaphorical and spiritual. Allen thus sets Kempe's spiritual understanding, and that of

1. Kempe, *Book*, 68. All quotations from *The Book of Margery Kempe* will be cited parenthetically in-text from this edition. For the marginalia, see London, British Library, MS Additional 61823, fol. 33v, fully digitized on the British Library website at http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_61823. Joel Fredell has undertaken the most recent and thorough analysis of the annotators of the manuscript and is the first to suggest that the scribe of this and other marginalia, whom he calls "Little Brown," might be Salthows, the scribe whose signature closes the manuscript. See Fredell, "Design and Authorship in the *Book of Margery Kempe*," *Journal of the Early Book Society* 12 (2009): 1–28. Fredell is also the project director for another highly useful digitized edition of the manuscript with facing-page transcriptions of the text at http://english.selu.edu/humanitiesonline/kempe/.

2. Rolle, *Incendium Amoris*, 243. For Allen's observation, see Kempe, *Book*, 323.

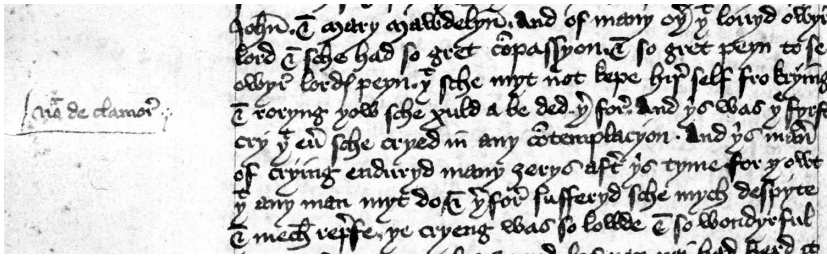

Figure 1. Marginalia from *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Lynn, ca. 1440. Little Brown (possibly Salthows) adds "nota de clamore" next to a section describing one of Kempe's loudest fits of weeping. © The British Library Board, MS Additional 61823, folio 33v.

her annotator, against other medieval mystics, such as the author of the late fourteenth-century treatise *The Cloud of Unknowing*, who warns:

> A 3ong man or a womman, newe set to þe scole of deuocion, hereþ þis sorow & þis desire be red & spokyn, how þat a man schal lift up his herte vnto God, & vnseesingly desire for to fele þe loue of here God. & as fast in a curiouste of witte þei conceyue þees wordes not goostly, as þei ben ment, bot fleschly & bodily, & trauaylen þeire fleschly hertes outrageously in þeire brestes.[3]

Here the *Cloud*-author advances a familiar distinction between bodily and spiritual sensation, aligning the misunderstanding of the novice contemplative or would-be mystic with a desperate excess of labor—that "outrageou[s]" work or "trauay[l]" that stirs the corporeal heart to a frenzied longing. As Sarah Beckwith has shown, interpretations such as Allen's, which elevate apophatic or negative strands of mysticism like the *Cloud*-author's over more effusive cataphatic or affective modes, are inflected by an ideological desire to protect the purity of the mystical by keeping it outside of time and the body.[4] A number of scholars since Beckwith have worked to accentuate and rehabilitate Kempe's role as a mystic of the body or, as Karma Lochrie would insist, the flesh.[5] Lochrie's important study, influenced by the work of French

3. Hodgson, *Cloud of Unknowing*, 85.

4. Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, esp. chap. 1, "The Transcendental and the Historical," 7–20.

5. Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991). In this important and foundational study, Lochrie distinguishes between the body and the flesh, showing how it was the flesh that was understood to represent "all the heaving powers allied against the spirit" (3). For more on the embodied nature of Margery Kempe's mysticism, see for example, Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 47–66; see also Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 154–87.

feminists like Hélène Cixous, identifies *The Book of Margery Kempe* as a kind of "écriture féminine," *avant la lettre*: a form of expression based in emotion, imagination, and the body that resists the oppressive logic of authoritative textual forms.[6] My work in this chapter builds from such readings by attending to the ways that Kempe's text foregrounds ecstatic, ebullient communication through the somatic and affective elements of language. Such expression is evident not only in the scenes of sobbing depicted in the *Book*, but also in what I call its clamorous style. As in the work of Richard Rolle, in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, noise functions as an important mode of lay understanding located immediately and viscerally in the body. By situating Kempe's clamor as an adaptation of Richard Rolle's echoic mysticism, I hope to draw attention to how such clamor is tied to style more than to biological sex. In the religious and literary culture of late medieval England, the pedagogical and communicative practices associated with echoic mysticism were understood to be feminine, in part because they were enthusiastically taken up by laywomen like Margery Kempe. But they were adopted by men and women alike.

Like Beckwith, Lochrie, and others, I want to take Margery Kempe seriously as a theologian in her own right. Her account, I argue, draws from and reworks Rolle's theories of voice and sound to produce her own lay theology of noise. A number of scholars have studied Margery Kempe's cries as a means of acquiring spiritual understanding by imitating the actions and feelings of holy figures, including Christ and the Virgin Mary.[7] These studies are invaluable in calling attention to the material and performative qualities of Kempe's mysticism. Yet they have consistently remained focused on the tearful aspect of Kempe's crying. The role of sound and noise—in a word, Margery's clamor—have gone relatively little-acknowledged, aside from Julie

6. For more on *écriture féminine*, see, for example, Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa." Rebecca Krug's more recent book-length study of *The Book of Margery Kempe* is also interested in Margery Kempe's formation of individual and collective identity based in reading and writing, though the writings of Adrienne Rich are more influential to her than those of Cixous and other French feminists. See Rebecca Krug, *Margery Kempe and the Lonely Reader* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017).

7. The first major study to situate Margery Kempe's tears in relation to the mystical practice of other holy women was Clarissa Atkinson's *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983). The most significant study to argue that Margery Kempe's tears are a form of *imitatio* is Lochrie's *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, esp. chap. 1, which discusses the ways Margery Kempe models her life after Christ, and chap. 5, which situates her tears within the tradition of the *mater dolorosa*. See also Gibson, *Theater of Devotion*, 48–50. For more on Margery Kempe's tears as an element of her malleable identity, see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's chapter, "The Becoming-Liquid of Margery Kempe" in *Medieval Identity Machines* at 154–87.

Orlemanski's essay on "Margery Kempe's 'Noyse.'"[8] Orlemanski identifies a three-part "crying plot"—a narrative structure common to all scenes of crying in the *Book*—that "begins with an initial process of spiritualized *perception*, leading to involuntary *vocalization*, which in turn incites the *reactions of others*."[9] Kempe's "crying plot" is, I argue, her adaptation of Rolle's echoic mysticism. The first two stages of the "crying plot" structure—perception and vocalization—are precisely what I have identified as crucial to Richard Rolle's echoic mysticism. Indeed, I will show how Kempe's clamor is just as much a form of *imitatio Rollis* as her tears and suffering are an *imitatio Christi* and *imitatio Mariae*. By adopting a Rollean approach to spiritual understanding, Kempe seeks to learn not only by miming the experience and emotions of holy figures, but also by cultivating her own experience of God through an immersive experience of sound. The third element of Orlemanski's "crying plot," the *Book*'s incorporation of reactions to Margery Kempe's clamor, shows how Kempe's embodiment of echoic mysticism is more social in its nature than that of Richard Rolle. Rather than emerging from and existing in stillness and quiet, Kempe's tears erupt out of busy exertion, both internal or emotional and external or physical. It is this business that draws Kempe's clamor away from the contemplative life of the hermit-mystic into the active and social life of the vernacular preacher.

Indeed, in adapting Rolle's echoic mysticism to her own purposes, Margery Kempe fashions herself not only after Rolle, but also after a Pentecostal apostle. In the biblical account of Pentecost, which Kempe translates into her own domestic milieu and vernacular idiom, the apostles perceive the word of God as a loud sound and feeling of wind and heat, which bestows on them a "gift of tongues." As Christine Cooper-Rompato has shown, xenoglossia is an important hagiographic trope in *The Book of Margery Kempe*.[10] Yet scholars have not yet taken into account the ways that Kempe's narrative combines

8. Julie Orlemanski, "Margery Kempe's 'Noyse' and Distributed Expressivity," in Kleinman, *Voice and Voicelessness in Medieval Europe*, 123–38. Another treatment of Margery Kempe's tears, which approaches the issue of noise, albeit obliquely, is Cohen's chapter on Kempe in *Medieval Identity Machines*. This chapter contains an extended treatment of Margery's voice in relation to Lacanian psychoanalysis and a significant discussion of the ways that Margery perceives the voice of God as thunder. Cohen's larger purpose, however, is to emphasize the malleability or "liquid" quality of Kempe's identity, rather than to study how her voice and perception of sounds contributes to a particular lay epistemology. For his Lacanian treatment of Kempe's voice, see Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, 162–79; for his discussion of the voice of God as weather portents, see 179–85.

9. Orlemanski, "Margery Kempe's 'Noyse,'"131–32. Orlemanski outlines the tripartite structure of the "crying plot" through a close reading of one example at 131–36.

10. Christine Cooper-Rompato, *The Gift of Tongues: Women's Xenoglossia in the Later Middle Ages* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 103–42.

xenoglossia with a glossolalic inarticulacy, expressed as cries and wails. This focus overlooks the ways that the *Book* highlights nonsemantic language. Margery's miraculous communication occurs not only at the semantic level through xenoglossia, but also at a somatic and affective level through the performative quality of Kempe's clamorous weeping.[11]

Attending to Margery's polyvocal performativity—her visceral communication through the affecting force of her clamor—can shed light on the *Book*'s larger purpose, as well as its complex authorship and style. Margery's clamor communicates in a way that is impressionistic and multiple rather than pointedly dogmatic. Julie Orlemanski calls Kempe's impressionistic vocality a kind of "distributed expressivity" and emphasizes how it "renders her utterances radically vulnerable to others' interpretations."[12] Indeed, the *Book* is aware of this distinction. Though occasionally, Margery seems to adopt the conventional role of a priest delivering a sermon, the *Book* also presents her clamor as an alternative pedagogical mode to the homiletic and hagiographic styles of conventional religious and literary culture. Kempe's polyvocal clamor and the more traditional communicative modes of literate clerical culture are in complex tension and interplay over the course of Kempe's narrative. Indeed, this is a dynamic we might expect given the *Book*'s account of its own creation, which foregrounds Margery Kempe's collaborative efforts to record her visionary experiences twenty years after their beginning, with a series of amanuenses of varying skill and ability. The *Book* is caught between making its best attempt to record the noise of Margery's voice—which resists representation in its radical aural alterity—and packaging her clamor into a linguistic and textual form that allows for the communication of a discrete and comprehensible morsel of spiritual truth. This interplay of distributed and pointed expression is evident in the *Book*'s textuality: both its style and its marginalia. Indeed, the *Book*'s early annotations highlight how later readers worried about the excessive carnality of Kempe's voice, but also took seriously and perhaps partially embraced its irrepressibly material nature.

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11. In many ways, my purpose in outlining the affective communicative networks that emerge from Margery Kempe's clamor is in line with that of Jonathan Hsy, whose study of the multilingual context and style of *The Book of Margery Kempe* attempts to complicate an *either-or* logic of translation. Rather than highlighting a unidirectional movement from one language into another in the *Book*, Hsy underscores a more polyglot logic of *both-and*, which facilitates a dynamic understanding of language encounter as a "mutual and bidirectional exchange." I will call attention to the *Book*'s impulse to embrace a polyvocal perspective, as well as attempts by an elite clerical culture to hone and contain such polyvocality. The language networks that interest me, however, are affective and physical rather than strictly linguistic. Jonathan Hsy, *Trading Tongues: Merchants, Multilingualism, and Medieval Literature* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013), 131–56.

12. Orlemanski, "Margery Kempe's 'Noyse,'" 123.

Margery Kempe's *Imitatio Rollis*

The Book of Margery Kempe is forthright about Richard Rolle's influence. As Margery visits the town of Norwich, she meets with the vicar of St. Stephens, telling him of her conversations with God. As she recounts, God tells her "how sche xuld lofe hym, worshepyn hym, & dredyn hym, so excellently þat sche herd neuyr boke, neyþyr Hyltons boke, ne Bridis boke, ne Stimulis Amoris, ne Incendium Amoris, ne non oþer þat euyr sche herd redyn þat spak so hyly of lofe of God but þat sche felt as hyly in werkyng in hir sowle yf sche cowd or ellys mygth a schewyd as sche felt" (39). Here the *Book* stresses how Margery has listened to or "herd" read aloud the writing of a number of contemporaneous mystical texts, including the *Incendium Amoris* of Richard Rolle. At the behest of God, Margery aims to surpass the spiritual love that she has heard described in the writings of other mystics.

To some extent, this description of purpose seems characteristic of the subtle logic of competition that occasionally effervesces in the narrative as Margery attempts to outdo other holy figures. When in a vision Margery becomes a handmaiden to the young Virgin Mary, for example, Mary tells her "I wold I wer worthy to be þe handmaiden of hir þat xuld conseive þe Sone of God" (18). Yet the idea of the ineffable is equally, if not more, important. Overall, the passage suggests that the mystic's love of God should not be able to be contained in writing and instead should be felt in the "werkyng of [the] sowle." This emphasis on spiritual fervor emerging from inner feeling is not an entirely new one. What is distinctive about Kempe's account is the suggestion that such feeling emerges not from stillness and quiet, but from the soul's busy working. Here it is instructive to compare this key word with its antecedent Rollean term, *calor*. While Rolle's noun suggests the outcome or sensory result of a particular set of actions, Kempe's gerundive "werkynge" implies the actions themselves: repeated and habitual, an affective mode that is ongoing. Indeed, as Orlemanski has highlighted, Kempe persistently uses variations of the verb "werken" throughout the *Book* to refer to the actions of God upon and within her soul.[13] With its connotations of hard toil and labor, the word intensifies the physical nature of Margery Kempe's mysticism.

Margery's inner "werkings" in turn arouse her tears and clamor, "working her up," so to speak. This is precisely the kind of "outrageou[s]" labor or "trauay[l]" that the *Cloud*-author warns against in his earlier work. If, as

13. Orlemanski, "Margery Kempe's 'Noyse,'" 133.

Sianne Ngai has argued, the "zany" is an aesthetic category characterized by desperate labor, Margery Kempe makes zany Rolle's echoic mysticism.[14] Zaniness, Ngai argues, exists at the intersection of social and occupational performance, and along with it, play and labor. Though she ultimately argues that zaniness is an aesthetic category nurtured by the conditions of late capitalism, Ngai also locates the origins of the zany in sixteenth-century Italian theater, where the stock character of the *zanni*—an itinerant servant—was a fixture. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to trace lines of influence between Margery Kempe (who visited Italy in the fifteenth century) and the Italian culture from which the *zanni* emerged. Here it will suffice to say that Ngai's contemporary aesthetic theory—in particular her articulation of this liminal position between work and play—chimes with what Eleanor Johnson has shown to be fundamental to medieval conceptions of idleness or waste: a category that encompassed both laziness and business in medieval England.[15] To characterize Margery Kempe's echoic mysticism as "zany" is to emphasize its place as a form of busy idleness in the cultural perception of its time, a place that underscores its dangerous position in relation to established clerical authority.

Part of Ngai's purpose is to expose and interrogate the ways that scholars have long dismissed so-called minor aesthetic categories in ways often tied to gender and sexuality.[16] This impulse may be productively placed in conversation with work by Beckwith, Lochrie, and other scholars, which has stressed the ways that the effusive and performative practices of affective mystics like Kempe have historically been labeled excessive and worldly in relation to the tactics of containment and control employed by others like the *Cloud*-author.[17] Here I introduce the idea of Kempe's zany religiosity as a means of underscoring the laboriousness of her noisemaking. Indeed, the idea of business—both in the sense of busy labor and work for profit—is linked to noise in a number of literary examples. The "Complaint against

14. Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, and Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 174–232.

15. Eleanor Johnson, "The Poetics of Waste: Medieval English Ecocriticism," *PMLA* 127, no. 3 (2012): 460–76.

16. Here I cannot resist a footnote to gesture to a potential avenue of inquiry for which I do not have space here: with her clamorous "werkyng," Kempe deserves a place, along with figures like Lucille Ball and others, in this genealogy of the zany. One imagines an essay examining the etymological and conceptual links between the term *werk*, common to the vernacular of contemporary drag culture, and its Middle English cognate.

17. Lochrie's exploration of the ways Kempe uses laughter and "good game" as a strategy to subvert established authorities and discourses lends itself particularly well to Ngai's theory of the zany. See Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, 135–66.

Blacksmiths" is one. Chaucer's short poem "The Former Age" is another: it contrasts the spontaneous or natural acquisition of needful things accompanied by "parfit quiete" (44) in the former age, with the "swety bysinesse" (28) and the "wep[ing] and cry[ing]" (60) of men in Chaucer's own time. In this context, the busy "werkyngs" of Margery's mystical style suggest a desire to embrace a fallen condition, transgressing the quiet life of the contemplative mystic—a form of spiritual experience that was socially sanctioned for women—and enter into the more worldly and social life of the preacher.

It is to this purpose that Kempe adapts Rolle's echoic mysticism. In a passage describing Margery's perception of heavenly sounds, the *Book* claims that Margery has experienced aural phenomena for "xxv ȝer at þe writyng of þis boke" (91), a timeline that corresponds nearly exactly with the beginning of her mystical visions, which occurred "xx ȝer and mo" (3) before the *Book*'s composition, according to its prologue. In presenting this aural experience as such a central element to her mysticism, Kempe is at least partially influenced by Richard Rolle. Indeed, in the passage most often cited as the primary locus of Rollean *canor*, Kempe describes hearing nocturnal music:

> On a nygth, as þis creatur lay in hir bedde with hir husbond, sche herd a sownd of melodye so swet & delectable, hir þowt, as sche had ben in Paradyse. And þerwyth sche styrt owt of hir bedde & seyd, "Alas þat euyr I dede synne, it is ful mery in Hevyn." Thys melody was so swete þat it passyd all þe melodye þat euyr mygth be herd in þis world wythowtyn ony comparyson, & caused þis creatur whan sche herd ony myrth or melodye aftyrward for to haue ful plentyuows & habundawnt teerys of deuocyon wyth *greet sobbyngys & syhyngys* aftyr þe blysse of Heuen, not dredyng þe schamys & þe spytys of þe wretchyd world. (11, emphasis added)[18]

Kempe's debt to Rolle's notion of angelic *canor* is fairly obvious in the "swet & delectable" "sownd of melodye" from heaven. It is less obvious how Margery effectively enacts a form of Rolle's echoic mysticism. Just as Rolle's mystic reacts to the joyous sounds of heaven by erupting with clamor, Kempe responds to the "mery" melody of heaven by bursting out with "plentyuows & habundawnt teerys of deuocyon" accompanied by "greet sobbyngys & syhyngys." Kempe's evocation of merriness and mirth in this passage resonates with another in which Margery delivers a homily extolling laughter

18. Andrew Albin, for example, cites this passage as the most apparent moment of Rollean *canor* in Kempe's *Book*. See Albin, "Listening for *Canor*," 189.

and "good game" (28) and recalls Rolle's treatment of spiritual *iocunditas*. Ultimately, these resonances amplify the coexistence of work and play within the spiritual program that Kempe adapts from Rolle.

Margery's experience of heavenly mirth shows her carrying out Rolle's recommendation for female acolytes who wish to cultivate access to spiritual *canor*. As we have seen, in outlining the purpose of a lyric incorporated into his instructional treatise *Ego Dormio*, Rolle recommends to his female audience: "If þou wil þynke þis [Passion lyric] euery day, þou shalt fynd gret swetnesse, þat shal draw þi hert vp, and mak þe fal in wepynge and in grete langynge to Ihesu."[19] Here Margery follows Orlemanski's "crying plot," which I argue is the same path of Rolle's echoic mysticism: the mystic perceives *canor*, then echoes it back with clamor, usually in the form of inarticulate tears and wails or "sobbyngys & syhyngys."

Medieval lyrics in the tradition of the Marian lament often pair "sobbing and sighing" in lyric tableaus of the grieving Virgin. As Kathy Lavezzo has shown, this tradition is important to Margery Kempe's self-fashioning as one who identifies with and desires Christ's mother.[20] Yet Richard Rolle also uses variations of the refrain, sometimes linking it with song, to express the "wepynge" and "grete langynge" he hopes to cultivate among female acolytes. Rolle's lyrics express lamentation, for example, with the phrases "My songe is in seghynge" and "I sigh and sob both day and nyght." These refrains reinforce the contemplative process Rolle outlines in which the acolyte cultivates an inner experience of *canor* in the mind and expresses it in the body. Variations of the phrase also appear in other lyrics, such as a fifteenth-century English account of the grieving mother of Christ, "Filius Regis Mortuus Est," which begins "I met a mayde at þe citeys end, / sobbynge & syȝynge sche wes ny schente."[21] Karma Lochrie cites this poem as an example of the larger tradition of the *mater dolorosa* or "woman of sorrows," a religious trope that she argues is an influence on Margery Kempe's tears and wails.[22] In the passage above, Margery's sobbings and sighings emerge at a crucial experience of heavenly melody, underscoring Rolle's influence on her self-presentation as well.

Though it is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine in detail, it is worth noting that this nexus of associations, which link sobbing, sighing, and

19. Rolle, *Prose and Verse*, 31.

20. Lavezzo, "Sobs and Sighs between Women." For more on the Marian lament in England, see McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, 150–73.

21. Carlton Brown, ed., *Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), 9.

22. Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, 178–87.

song in the writing of both Rolle and Kempe, may suggest that echoic mysticism was important in the development of a larger tradition of lay devotional lyric encompassing the trope of the *mater dolorosa*. Sarah McNamer locates a shift in the Middle English tradition of the Marian lament around the late fourteenth century (just before Margery Kempe began to experience her visions), arguing, in part, that the English tradition amplified the emotionality and compassionate expression of its continental precursors. In making this argument, McNamer, like Beckwith and other feminist scholars before her, critiques a strand of criticism that dismisses these later medieval Marian lyrics for their "excessive emotionalism" and "immoderate grief." I would suggest that such objections to emotionally "excessive" expression are part of the history of noise, as McNamer inadvertently suggests when she notes how one scholar "seems to reproach the Virgin herself for the apparent *senselessness* of her outpourings."[23] At the very least, it is clear that *The Book of Margery Kempe* follows and adapts a model of echoic mysticism developed by Rolle in presenting Margery's clamorous sobbing and sighing as an outcome of her experience of heavenly *canor*.

In framing a line of influence between Rolle and Kempe I do not mean to downplay Kempe's accomplishment as religious thinker. Though she is clearly influenced by Rolle, Kempe takes his ideas and runs with them, making innovations that serve her own more public spiritual program, as we will see. Nor do I wish to make invidious comparisons between the two mystics in a way that presents Kempe's mysticism as a lesser or misunderstood form of Rolle's.[24] It is important to note the conceptual and stylistic resonances between these two mystics in order to shift discussions of gender and mysticism to focus on ideas of femininity rather than female mystics. In making this move, I aim for a capacious reading of Cixous's notion of *écriture féminine*, one that translates closer to "feminine writing" than "women's writing," in order to emphasize its stylistic and performative nature. It is true, I would argue, that such style has been adopted widely, even primarily among women, in large part because it lies outside of the standard literate forms from which they have so often been excluded. It is this historical reality that has led such "lewed" forms of expression—no matter the sex of their

23. McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, 157 (emphasis added).

24. Lochrie justifies her own omission of such lines of influence on the grounds that they too frequently turn to such comparisons in *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, 5–6. While I admire the impulse to move away from such hierarchies, I believe it is possible to more fully contextualize Kempe's work in relation to Rolle's without resorting to them.

speakers—to be persistently labeled feminine and so subordinate to ideals and standards of masculine literacy.[25]

In order to show that echoic mysticism is not conceptually or stylistically common to female mystics, I turn briefly to Julian of Norwich, the English mystic and one-time spiritual advisor to Margery Kempe. Julian's mysticism is startlingly and imaginatively conceived and described, highlighting a highly learned and innovative mind. Yet in many ways, perhaps because her motivations are less public than those of Kempe, it hews to traditional distinctions between interior and exterior sensation in underscoring the importance of quiet and silence. Julian's fifth revelation, which details how the devil's temptations are overcome through the Passion of Christ, begins:

> And after [the fourth revelation] er God shewid ony words, He sufferd me to beholden in Him a conable tyme, and all that I had sene, and all intellecte that was therein, as the simplicite of the soule migte take it. Than He, without voice and openyng of lippis, formys in my soule these words: *Herewith is the fend overcome*.[26]

Julian is a visionary in the most fundamental sense of the word. Her mystical experience begins, not with language, but with "behold[ing]." Language enters the vision only after this experience of interior vision, though it is a form of language without the mediation of the body. Indeed, the idea that God speaks to Julian "without voice and opening of lippis" (135) appears elsewhere in the *Shewings* as well, underscoring Julian's emphasis on the quiet and stillness of her mysticism.

This quietude, which Julian later calls her "restfull shewyng" (134), contrasts with the noise that her visions associate with devilish carnality and worldliness. In one vision of the crucifixion, Julian sees a host of devils

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25. Though many readers would disagree with me, I read this emphasis on style in Cixous's original articulation of *écriture féminine*. Among the many examples of *écriture féminine* that she discusses, Cixous cites the language of Molly Bloom, a character whose voice was written by a man. See Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 884. In effect, I am building on the work of scholars like Rita Copeland, who have highlighted the ways that unconventional lay forms of reading were understood to be feminine among the clerical elite. See Rita Copeland, "Why Women Can't Read: Medieval Hermeneutics, Statutory Law, and the Lollard Heresy Trials," in *Representing Women: Law, Literature, and Feminism*, ed. Susan Sage Heinzelman and Zipporah Batshaw Wiseman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 254–86. In a book-length study, Copeland advances a similar argument that underscores how lay reading was figured as childish rather than feminine. See *Pedagogy, Intellectuals, and Dissent in the Later Middle Ages: Lollardy and Ideas of Learning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

26. Julian of Norwich, *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Georgia Ronan Crampton (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994), 56. All further references to Julian's *Shewings* will be cited parenthetically by page number from this edition.

and explains that, though she is "seker and save" when she views the cross, "beside the Crosse was no sekernes for uggyng of fends" (63). Julian's portrait of the scene places the teeming plurality of fiends in contrast to the serene singularity of the cross. She later recounts how a devil attempts to lure her to despair, linking the business of the world with noise:

> After this the fend came agen with his hete and with his stinke and made me full besy. The stinke was so vile and so peynfull and also dredful and travelous. Also I heard a bodily jangeling as it had be of two bodies, and both, to my thynkyng, jangyled at one time as if they had holden a parlement with a gret busyness. And al was soft muttering, as I understode nowte what they seid. (135)

This scene of devilish temptation associates a foul sensorium of stink and noise with "busyness": a raucous hubbub of movement and confusion that resists the quiet that Julian identifies with God. In an odd usage of the word, Julian asserts that the devil's noisy "jangeling" evokes two distinct bodies, like the raucous clamor of an un-unified parliament. This parliamentary metaphor implicitly disavows public life and reinforces Julian's own attachment to a secluded life of contemplation. Moreover, it ties such public life to noise; the devil's excessive and discordant body gives rise to his inscrutable muttering, which frustrates attempts at comprehension, such that Julian "understode nowte what they seid." The lesson Julian takes from this vision stresses her relatively traditional view of exterior sensation. The noise and discord the devil sows in this vision is a strategy to move her away from a unified position of faith in God, to bring about doubt—a form of mental doubling—and ultimately to draw her to despair as she vacillates from one thought to the next without a "seker" interpretation.

The causal link Julian cultivates between bodily sensation and spiritual doubt causes her to reflect on voiced prayer, first reinforcing the importance of silence and then reflecting on when bodily speech is acceptable:

> And al this [the vision of muttering devils] was to stirre me to dispeir, as methowte, semand to me as thei scornyd bidding of beds, which arn seid boistrosly with mouth, failing devowte entending and wise diligens the which we owen to God in our prayors. And our Lord God gave me grace mytyly for to trosten in Him, and to comforten my soule with bodily spech, as I schuld have don to another person that had ben travelled. Methowte that bysynis myte not be likenyd to no bodily bysynes. (135–36)

Like Chaucer's "Former Age," this passage also links bodily business with noise. Julian condemns the muttering devils whose perverse prayer is "seid boistrosly with mouth." The word *boistrose*, meaning "crude or noisy"—from the Old French *boisteous* or "limping"—implies that such prayer lacks a straight path from interior investment to action or the "devowte entendyng and wise diligens" that is owed to God.[27] This dis-alignment of "entending" and speech enables the sounds, motions, and physical sensations of the body in prayer to overtake the yearning of the individual soul in its straight path toward Christ. For Julian, such boisterous prayer is in contrast to correct "bodily spech," a gift from God that offers Julian spiritual comfort and allows her to comfort others in "trava[il]." The word recalls the *Cloud*-author's condemnation of those whose hearts travail, or in Kempe's parlance, those who "werk" in devotion. Though she acknowledges that any bodily speech is a form of "bysynis," Julian is keen to distinguish between the correct speech that gives comfort and the "bodily bysynes" that both causes and expresses despair. Here Julian gestures toward a modest aspiration to influence the spiritual health and knowledge of others through conversation and speech in the manner of a priestly confessor. But her primary focus lies instead in cultivating the internal stability and quiet that she deems necessary for true spiritual knowledge of Christ.

Bird and Bellows in Kempe's Adaptation of Pentecost

Like Julian, Kempe is aware of the long-standing hierarchies between inner and outer perception and voice. Yet she is far more intent on circumventing them. This becomes clear in chapter 36, which I argue is central to Kempe's adaptation of Rolle's echoic mysticism. Near the chapter's opening, God tells Margery, "þu xalt haue more meryte in Heuyn for o 3er of thynkyng in þi mende þan for an hundryd 3er of preyng wyth þi mowth. . . . And 3et, dowtyr, I wyl not be displesyd wyth þe whedir þu thynke, sey, or speke, for I am al-wey plesyd wyth þe" (89–90). Here Kempe rehearses the common idea that an interior prayer, one that emerges from "thynkyng in þ[e] mende," is preferable and more devout than one that is physically articulated "wyth þ[e] mowth." Yet she adds that God grants her the special privilege of bodily speech, sanctioning her own voice in all its bodily excesses. This claim to privileged access to the spoken word paves the way for Margery's role as

27. *MED*, s.v. "boistous," https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary.

an active evangelist of the word, contextualizing her self-presentation as a Pentecostal apostle.[28]

Indeed, the end of this chapter fashions Margery as a vernacular preacher by adapting her echoic mysticism after another authoritative model of divine inspiration by ear: the biblical scene of Pentecost, which authorizes the twelve apostles to preach the word of God.[29] According to the biblical account,

> when the days of the Pentecost were accomplished, they [the apostles] were all together in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak. (Acts 2:1–4)[30]

Here, the presence of the Holy Ghost makes itself known not as a voice but instead through sensory tokens: first a spontaneous sound of mysterious origin, and then the feeling of heat and appearance of flame. In this way, the account evokes two elements that comprise the voice: breath and body, or in this case, wind and tongue. With these pneumatic and lingual associations, the biblical account thus frames the voice of God in terms that are simultaneously familiar and different: what seems at first to be a superhuman elemental force is also somewhat like a human. This presentation of the divine voice raises a crucial problem within the Christian intellectual tradition: the radical alterity of divine encounter can only be communicated in all too human terms.

Kempe's adaptation of this biblical account embraces this process of familiarization, rendering the awesome apostolic experience into her own much more modest and intimate encounter with the voice of God:

> Thys creatur had diuers tokenys in hir bodily heryng. On was a maner of sownde as it had ben a peyr of belwys blowyng in hir ere. Sche,

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28. In examining Kempe as a preacher, I am building on the work of other scholars who have called attention to Margery's complexly veiled engagement in the active life. See, for example, Michael J. Wright, "What They Said to Margery Kempe: Narrative Reliability in Her *Book*," *Neophilologus* 79, no. 3 (1995): 497–508; Sandra McEntire, "The Dialogics of Margery Kempe and Her *Book*," *Mystics Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2000): 190; and Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, 107.

29. Here I am building on observations by scholars like Lynn Staley, who has suggested that Kempe undertakes to build a cross-national Pentecostal community that critiques English religiosity and ecclesiastical authority; see Lynne Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 123.

30. Ziolkowski, *The Vulgate Bible*, 6:616–19.

> being a-basshed þerof, was warnyd in hir sowle no fer to haue, for it was þe sownd of þe Holy Gost. & þan owyr Lord turnyd þat sownde in-to þe voys of a dowe, & sithyn he turnyd it into þe voys of a lityl bryd whech is callyd a reedbrest þat song ful merily oftyn-tymes in hir right here. & þan schuld sche euyr-mor han gret grace aftyr þat sche herd swech a tokyn. (90–91)

As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has observed, this scene amounts to a "domestication" of Pentecost: a translation of language and imagery from a biblical register into the vernacular idiom of an English housewife.[31] The common household instrument of the bellows offers a gentle incarnation of the "mighty wind," its fireside associations evoking the biblical "tongues of flame" as well as Rolle's "fire of love."

By adding the voices of birds—a dove and an English robin redbreast—Kempe also plays with contemporaneous iconography of Pentecost, which frequently depicted the Holy Ghost as a dove. The St. Omer Psalter, a manuscript created in Norfolk ca. 1330–1440, and thus roughly contemporaneous in time and place with Kempe's *Book*, represents the Holy Ghost in this way. Adjacent to Psalm 109, the St. Omer Psalter includes a small scene of Pentecost among eight other scenes from the Passion (figure 2).

As the apostles gather in a circle, a dove emerges from the top center of the medallion with lines streaming from its beak. These tongues of flame extend toward the heads of the surrounding apostles, touching them with the physical presence of the divine.[32] With this domesticating gesture, the *Book* fashions Margery as a Pentecostal apostle for the English town of Bishop's Lynn and beyond.

Indeed, the scene of Pentecost sees the apostles bestowed with a gift of tongues. While early ecclesiasts and church commentators debated the precise nature of this gift of tongues, they consistently read it as a divine reward, authorizing the apostles to preach and convert those across the world.[33] Like the apostles, Margery is granted a gift of tongues in her ability to communicate across language barriers at both the semantic and the somatic level. As scholars like Hsy and Cooper-Rompato have highlighted, Margery's travel

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31. See Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, 161.

32. See London, British Library, Yates Thompson MS 14, fol. 120r. The biblical scene of Pentecost was influential in late medieval England and was depicted widely in psalters and other religious texts. For more on Pentecost and late medieval lay piety, see Clifford Davidson, *Festivals and Plays in Late Medieval England* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 107–38.

33. For an overview of Pentecost and its outcomes in the Christian biblical and intellectual tradition, see Cooper-Rompato, *Gift of Tongues*, 6–15.

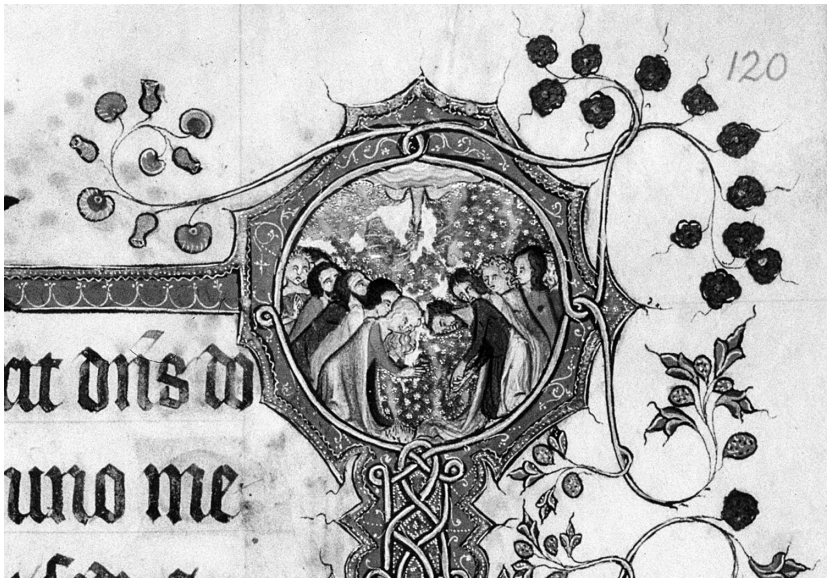

Figure 2. A medallion depicting Pentecost in the St. Omer Psalter, Norfolk ca. 1330–1440. © The British Library Board, Yates Thompson MS 14, folio 120r (detail).

across Europe and into the Holy Land affords her with a number of opportunities for cross-linguistic communication. Yet these scholars focus largely on moments in which Margery conveys and understands semantic meaning despite language difference, either to indicate how Kempe adopts the hagiographic trope of miraculous xenoglossia or to underscore the *Book*'s multilingual context. Building from this work, I suggest that Margery's xenoglossia should be read in conjunction with her clamorous weeping, the latter of which functions as a kind of glossolalia: a performative mode of communication that prompts an experiential knowledge through the emotions and sensations of the body.

In a central example of Margery's xenoglossia, she is in the Roman church of St. John Lateran's, when she is "sor mevyd in spiryt" (82) to speak with a German priest, later named Wenslawe. Because "þe preste vndirstod non Englysch ne wist not what sche seyd, & sche cowed non oþer langage þan Englisch," the *Book* explains that they speak through an "jnter-pretowr" (82). Through this interpreter, she asks Wenslawe to pray for the grace to understand her:

> & aftyr therten days þe preste cam ageyn to hir to preuyn þe effect of her preyerys, & þan he vndirstod what sche seyd in Englysch to hym & sche vnderstod what þat he seyd. & 3et he vndirstod not Englisch þat

> oþer men spokyn; þow þei spokyn þe same wordys þat sche spak, 3et he vndirstod hem not les þan sche spak hir-selfe. Than was sche confessyd to þis prest of alle hir synnes as ner as hir mende wold seruyn hir fro hir childhode vn-to þat owre & receyued hir penawns ful joyfully. (83)

The scene is built around the problem that language difference poses to Margery's spiritual health and virtue. If she were to confess to an uncomprehending priest, how could he fully absolve her of her sins and offer penance without fully understanding them? And if she could not understand his prescription for penance, how could she adequately perform it? A later episode makes it clear that such problems are a major source of strife with Margery's fellow pilgrims in Rome, when they, failing to understand the nature of her xenoglossic communication with Wenslawe, complain that "sche was schreuyn at a preste which cowed not vndirstondyn hir langwage ne hir confessyown" (97). Margery's xenoglossia solves a problem of precise, semantic understanding, allowing her to maintain the necessary kind of relationship with a confessor in foreign lands in a way that was sanctioned by the church.

What is remarkable about the *Book*'s configuration of Margery's xenoglossia is the way that it appears to defer to priestly authority, yet nevertheless makes Margery the prime mover behind the process. Though it is the priest who ought to be the intercessor between Margery and God, Margery instead becomes an intercessor for the priest so that he may perform his pastoral duties, despite the barrier of language difference. In this way, even as it reinforces Margery's apparent subordination to priestly power, this episode also stresses her remarkable degree of influence over such authority. Through such miraculous instances of xenoglossia, the *Book* begins to show Margery appropriating a measure of priestly agency, although hidden behind poses of subordination.

Margery's xenoglossia intersects more pointedly with her appropriation of pastoral power in another episode shortly after this first encounter with Wenslawe. With the help of her ally, Margery stages an elaborate performance of xenoglossia—one that approaches a homily or sermon—in order to prove the truth of her claims to her dubious fellow pilgrims. With the assistance of an English priest who "trost[ed] to hir as to hys modyr" (97), Margery holds a feast and invites her naysayers and Wenslawe. Here, Margery converses with the English priest while Wenslawe sits sulkily, "in a maner of heuyness for cawse he vndirstod not what þei seyden in Englysch" (97). Having established for her audience Wenslawe's incomprehension of English, Margery turns to a homily: "Sche telde in hyr owyn langage in Englysch a story of Holy Writte, whech sche had lernyd of clerkys while sche was at hom in Inglond,

for sche wolde spekyn of no vanyte ne of no fantasijs" (97). Ultimately, this test proves to the crowd that Wenslawe "vndirstod what sche seyde & sche vndirstod what he seyd, & he cowed vndirstonde non oþer Englysch-man" (98). Like the previous account of xenoglossia with Wenslawe, this episode highlights Margery's veiled appropriation of priestly authority. By delivering a story from the bible in the manner of a priest delivering a sermon, rather than a fictional story of "vanyte" or "fantasijs" Margery demonstrates her direct access to spiritual truth. Yet in a gesture that couches her authority in deference to the literate clerical class, the passage emphasizes that she knows the story not from her own reading, but from clerks.

This complex interplay of authority and subordination is also at play as Kempe's xenoglossia intersects with a mode of performative communication that often takes the form of clamorous glossolalia. Like her xenoglossia, Margery's clamor communicates across language barriers. Yet it is not grounded in semantic understanding in the same way as Margery's xenoglossia, instead communicating at the level of affect and sensation. Though it is often misconstrued as antisocial by her English-speaking naysayers, Margery's clamor is deeply social, and often a means of facilitating an affective bond of compassion with non-English-speakers, usually women or other marginalized figures. As Lavezzo has shown, Margery's clamor very often emerges out of, or in conjunction with, other displays of compassion. The actors and audience of these performances come together to form affective networks grounded in desire and identification between women.[34] Here I will show how these clamorous displays of compassion also very often facilitate a material demonstration of that compassion in the form of charity. The persistent charitable outcome of Margery's clamor begins to suggest how it operates as a means of somatic teaching.

Margery's clamorous glossolalia intersects with these affective demonstrations of compassion at several moments in and around the city of Rome. Traveling between Venice and Rome with her guide, the broken-backed Richard of Ireland, Kempe is joined by two Grey friars and a woman, carrying "a chyst & an ymage þerin mad aftyr our Lord" (77). Kempe explains, "& non of hem cowed vndirstand hir langage, & 3et þei ordeyned for hir euery day mete, drynke, & herborwe as wel as he dedyn for hem-selfe" (77). As they travel to Rome, Richard bids her to stay with the others while he sets

34. For more on the ways that Margery is treated worse by her own countrymen and better by those in other countries, see Cooper-Rompato, *Gift of Tongues*, 128–29. See also Terrence Bowers, "Margery Kempe as Traveler," *Studies in Philology* 97, no. 1 (2000): 22. For more on the affective bonds between women facilitated by Margery's tears, see Lavezzo, "Sobs and Sighs between Women."

off to beg during the day. During this time, Margery and her companions engage in performances of feeling that incite further compassion, both for the infant Christ and for Kempe's own suffering:

> And þe woman the which had þe ymage in þe chist, whan þei comyn in good citeys, sche toke owt þe ymage owt of hir chist & sett it in worshepful wyfys lappys. & thei wold puttyn schirtys þerup-on & kissyn it as þei it had ben God hym-selfe. & whan þe creatur sey þe worshep & þe reuerens þat þei dedyn to þe ymage, sche was takyn wyth swet deuocyon & swet meditacyons þat sche wept wyth gret sobbyng & lowed crying. (77–78)

Here the problem of a language barrier gives rise to performative modes of exchange that communicate at the level of physicality and emotion. Kempe's companion demonstrates her care for Jesus, performing it quite literally, using a simulacrum of the infant Christ, with an interactive audience of "worshepful wyfys." Observing the care that they lavish on this prop as they clothe and kiss it incites the same compassionate love for Christ in Kempe, who expresses that fervor with her clamorous sobbing and crying. Kempe's wailing in turn incites the compassionate acts of others. When they see her display of piety, the "good women" who play with the doll "ordeyned a good soft bed & leyd hir þerup-on & comfortyd hir as mech as þei myth for owyr Lordys lofe, blyssed mot he ben" (78).

A similar intersection of glossolalic clamor, compassion, and charity occurs when Margery encounters "a worshepful lady, Dame Margarete Florentyn" while in Rome and "neiþyr of hem cowd wel vndirstand oþer but be signys er tokenys & in fewe comown wordys" (93). Despite this, the Florentine woman asks "Margerya in pouerte?" to which Margery replies "Ȝa grawnte pouerte, Madam" (93). Hsy calls attention to this exchange as a kind of makeshift pidgin, which ultimately shows that "the 'Englysch' Margery . . . can, when push comes to shove, display a functional proficiency in at least one other vernacular language."[35] And indeed, when Margarete the Florentine invites the English Margery to attend meals with her regularly, it seems that she understands Margery's "pouerte," a word that occurs both in Italian and in French-inflected Middle English vernaculars. Yet equally important is the extrasemantic communication—Margery's performative clamor and the compassion it incites—that is added to this exchange. In response to Margarete's kindness, Margery "sat & wept ful

35. Hsy, *Trading Tongues*, 138.

sor," and Margarete gives Margery a "hamper wyth oþer stuffe þat sche might makyn hir potage þerwyth" (93). As in the previous account of Margery's interactions with "worshepful wyfys" and the doll of Christ, Margery overcomes language difference with clamorous displays of emotion, which incite both compassion and charity in her audience.

In this way, the clamor that results from Margery's echoic mysticism plays a subtle pedagogical role: one that the *Book* explicitly offers as an alternative to authoritative forms of preaching. Again, while Margery is abroad in Rome, she sits in church listening to the "sermownys wher Duchemen & oþer men prechyd, techyng þe lawys of God" when she feels "sorwe and heuynes" in her heart and hopes "to be refreschyd with sum crumme of gostly vndirstondyng" (98). After stressing the limits of priestly power in this way, Kempe turns again to echoic mysticism. Evoking Rollean *canor* both in content and in mellifluous alliteration, Christ speaks to Margery with "melydiows voys swettest of all sauowrys softly sowndyng in hir sowle" (98). The *Book* describes the effects of this mystical communion between Margery and God:

> Þan was hir sowle so delectabely fed wyth þe swet dalyawns of owr Lorde & so fulfilled of hys lofe þat as a drunkyn man sche turnyd hir first on þe o syde & sithyn on þe oþer wyth gret wepyng & gret sobbyng, vn-mythy to kepyn hir-silfe in stabilness, for þe vnqwenchabyl fyer of lofe which brent ful sor in hir sowle. Þan meche pepyl wonderyd up-on hir, askyng hir what sche eyled, to whom sche as a creatur al wowndyd wyth lofe & as reson had fayled, cryed wyth lowed voys, "Þe Passyon of Crist sleth me." Þe good women, hauyng compassyon of hir sorwe & gretly meruelyng of hir wepyng & of hir crying, meche þe mor þei louyd hir. & þerfor þei, desiryng to make hir solas & comfort aftyr hir gostly labowr, be sygnys & tokenys, for sche vndirstod not her speche, preyid hir and in a maner compellyd hir to comyn hom to hem, willyng þat sche xulde not gon fro hem. (98–99)

The sound of God's melodious voice renders Margery like "a drunkyn man," as if "reson had fayled." This ecstatic state kindles a "fyer of lofe" expressed, as we have come to expect from Margery, as clamorous "wepyng & gret sobbyng," which in turn prompts the "good women" in her audience to offer her charitable "solas & comfort." Though the scene begins with a language barrier, underscoring the limits of semantic comprehension, Margery ultimately engages echoic mysticism to circumvent those limitations and arrive at a deeper and fuller spiritual knowledge. The "gostly vndirstondyng" that Margery longs for, feels, and conveys to others in a pointed

circumvention of homiletic models is inarticulate and felt rather than rationally comprehended or articulated.

Kempe's Clamorous Style

The brief emphasis on alliteration at the moment above, when Margery hears "Crist Ihesu, whos melydiows voys swettest of all sauowrys softly sowndyng in hir sowle" (98), echoes Rolle's Latin *Incendium* and invites us to ask how the clamor of Margery's voice makes its way into the style as well as the content of the text. Alliteration was a crucial strategy for enacting Richard Rolle's clamorous *canor*. While alliteration does occasionally make its way into *The Book of Margery Kempe*, as the example above suggests, my focus will be on how the *Book*'s style approaches noise in two apparently conflicting ways: both in its seeming disorder and nonlinearity, and in moments of highly structured rhetoric and syntax.

Indeed, attending to the ways that the *Book* offers itself as a clamorous textual object offers a way of reading its composite authorship as well as its affective pedagogical purpose. In seeking to understand Kempe as a historical figure, in particular a woman operating in a world that linked authority to Latinate literacy and thus primarily to men, scholars have tended to emphasize how the *Book* works to secure Kempe's authority and establish her status as a saint by calling attention to her complex negotiations of clerical authority and appropriations of hagiographic tropes. Doing so, however, misses the ways that the *Book*, in keeping with many of the scenes it depicts, might use the sounds of its language to incite feeling and facilitate compassion in its audience. Importantly, it does so in part through rhetoric that stems from learned and Latinate culture. A. C. Spearing has highlighted how certain stylistic elements of the *Book* suggest how Margery Kempe's voice was subjected to a process of "textualization and clericalization." Ultimately, he argues that "it is time to read *The Book of Margery Kempe* not as the speech from which it originates, but as the written text into which that speech has been shaped."[36] Doing so, I argue in this section, accentuates how the clamorous style of echoic mysticism offered an alternate communicative and pedagogical mode available to laywoman and cleric alike. Just as Margery's clamor communicates by inciting compassion, the clamorous style of its composite author—which claims to give voice to feelings rather

36. A. C. Spearing, "Margery Kempe," in *A Companion to Middle English Prose*, ed. A. S. G. Edwards (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 93–94.

than information—teaches with an affective and impressionistic approach, a somatic mode of communication that is accessible across barriers of language and literacy.

In its account of its own creation, *The Book of Margery Kempe* repeatedly proclaims its purpose to record Margery's spiritual experience with language that emphasizes emotion and embodiment. After briefly recounting how Margery received counsel from religious authorities to "folwyn hyr meuynggys & hyr steringgys," Kempe underscores how those authorities prompt her to write this experience:

> Summe of these worthy & worshepful clerkys token it in perel of her sowle and as þei wold answer to God þat þis creatur was inspyred wyth þe Holy Gost and bodyn hyr þat sche schuld don hem wryten & maken a booke of hyr *felyngys & hir reuelacyons*. Sum proferyd hir to wryten hyr *felyngys* wyth her owen handys, & sche wold not consentyn in no wey, for sche was comawndyd in hir sowle þat sche schuld not wrytyn so soone. & so it was xx 3er and mor fro þat tym þis creatur had fyrst *felyngys & reuelacyons* er þan sche dede any wryten. Aftyrward, whan it plesyd ower Lord, he comawnded hyr & chargyd hir þat sche xuld don wryten hyr *felyngys & reuelacyons* & þe forme of her leuyng þat hys goodnesse myth be knowyn to alle þe world. (3–4, emphasis added)

The passage presents Margery as the earthly prime mover (albeit subject to the will of God) behind the narrative and the text. Taking orders from divine rather than earthly authority, she defers the transcription of her experience into text until God instructs her to do so. The *Book*'s emphasis on Margery's divinely authorized control over the narrative corresponds with a repeated move to privilege her emotional and bodily experience over the concrete knowledge that comes from that experience. Margery's "reuelacyons," those particular insights revealed to her as spiritual truth, are subordinate to her "felyngys" of that truth.

This emphasis on Margery's feeling—as both emotion and sensation—gives rise to an innovative variation on the ineffability topos. In keeping with the *Book*'s emphasis on feeling, Margery's first scribe is an Englishman from Germany who has "good knowlach of þis creatur *& of hir desyr*" (4, emphasis added).[37] When this scribe dies, Margery takes what he has written to a second scribe, who agrees to work with her. But, "Þe booke was so euel wretyn

37. Scholars have offered compelling evidence to suggest that this first scribe is Margery Kempe's son. For an overview of scholarship comparing this account of the *Book*'s beginning and its treatment of Margery Kempe's son in book 2, as well as additional manuscript evidence, see Sebastian

þat he cowd lytyl skyll þeron, for it was neiþyr good Englysch ne Dewch, ne þe lettyr was not schapyn ne formyd as oþer letters ben" (4). Citing this passage, Cooper-Rompato calls this language used by the first scribe a "hybrid vernacular language," discussing Margery's intervention as another example of miraculous xenoglossia. With its invocation of "Englysch [and] Dewch" languages, the *Book* does invite this characterization.[38] Yet while the first scribe's "euel" writing could refer in a very literal way to his hybrid language and/or bad penmanship, here I want to stress how this detail extends the *Book*'s previous emphasis on Margery's feeling to amplify how her experience resists containment in language. In effect, the illegible writing of the first draft of the manuscript is an extension of its protagonist's clamorous voice. The process of refinement and translation of the first scribe's "euel" writing is an effort—one that was never fully completed, perhaps by design—to render that written noise into comprehensible language.

The *Book* is at pains to show Margery's oversight of this process. A third scribe makes an attempt to rewrite the scribblings, but, like the second, he "cowd not wel fare þerwyth, þe boke was so euel sett & so vnreasonably wretyn" (4). Finally, the second scribe in possession of the manuscript, and the first to attempt to rewrite it, asks Margery to "prey to God for hym and purchasyn hym grace to redden it and wrytyn it also" (5). It is only after Margery's intercession that "Þe prest, trustyng in hire prayers, began to redyn þis booke, & it was mych mor esy, as him thowte, þan it was be-forntym" (5). The transactional Middle English verb "purchasyn" emphasizes Margery's role as a *mediatrix* of this exchange, a position emphasized again when the priest must enlist Margery's spiritual aid for help with his vision. This complex account of authorship ultimately indicates a tension between the clamor of Margery's voice, with its impressionistic and affective impact, and the clear and intentional language of clerical culture. As Cohen writes, the *Book* "resists harmonization into linear chronology."[39] The chaotic structure of the *Book*, which "is not wretyn in ordyr, . . . but lych as þe mater cam to þe creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn" (5), maintains Margery's clamor as a stylistic device, even as it works to make such noise more clearly communicable.

Sobecki, "'The Writyng of This Tretys': Margery Kempe's Son and the Authorship of Her Book," *SAC* 37 (2015): 257–83.

38. Cooper-Rompato, *Gift of Tongues*, 110. Cooper-Rompato discusses the *Book*'s creation as an example of vernacular xenoglossia at 110–15.

39. Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, 167.

The *Book*'s efforts to maintain Margery's clamor in tension with more direct clerical language is evident in its final prayer. Here Margery's cry is delivered in the first person in a way that bridges both semantic and somatic communication. In its final chapter, the *Book* returns to the scene of Pentecost, invoking the Pentecostal prayer, *Veni creator spiritus* (Come creator spirit), to summon God's grace before Margery begins her own concluding orison. Kempe explains, "Whan sche had sayd '*Veni creator spiritus*' wyth þe versys, sche seyd on þis maner, 'The Holy Gost I take to witnesse, owr Lady, Seynt Mary, þe modir of God, al holy cowrte of hevyn, and all my gostly faderys her in erth'" (248). At this moment, the *Book* switches from the third person into the first person, where it remains for its concluding pages. This shift to the first person creates the impression of a more direct access to the voice of Margery Kempe. In keeping with its foundation in the biblical account of Pentecost, Margery's voice incorporates a crosslinguistic lexis and syntax whose rhythm invites readers to experience its sounds not as language, but as noise. The prayer that follows shows a command of both Latinate and French syntax and rhetorical style, one that we assume would be tied to a more conventionally literate figure than Margery Kempe.[40] In a sentence of almost Ciceronian proportion, Margery prays:

> As for my crying, my sobbyng, & my wepyng, Lord God al-mythy, as wistly as þu knowist what scornys, what schamys, what despitys, & what repreuys I have had, þerfor, &, as wistly as it is not in my power to wepyn neyþyr lowde ne stille for no deuocyon ne for no swetnes, but only for þe ȝyft of the Holy Gost, so wistly, Lord, excuse me a-geyn al þis world to knowyn & to trowyn þat it is þi werke & þis ȝyfte for magnifying of þi name & for encresyng of oþer mennys lof to þe, Jhesu. (249)

The tripartite paratactic structure of the sentence, set up with the phrases "as wistly," "as wistly," and "so wistly," makes use of the common classical tropes of tricolon and *variatio*: the varied repetition of threes to create a sense of balanced imbalance. The prayer's smaller-scale anaphora and parallel structure are evident in the phrases "what scornys, what schamys, what despitys, & what repreuys" and "for magnifying of þi name & for encresyng of oþer mennys lof to þe." As Jonathan Hsy has noted, other moments of anaphora—for example, Kempe's descriptions of tempestuous overseas

40. For more on how Margery's rhetoric in her final prayer appropriates patriarchal language, see Dhira B. Mahoney, "Margery Kempe's Tears and the Power over Language," in *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland, 1992), 47–49.

travel earlier in book 1—demonstrate the "bureaucratic syntax of French business documents." The mercantile context of this romance syntax, which owes its presence to earlier Latin forms, is of less interest to me in this example than its associations with the French language. This multilingualism, in which Middle English words are arranged in Latin and French structures, tie the prayer's xenoglossic Pentecostal associations to its style. The repetition of such anaphora, as Hsy notes, produces a "lulling rhythmic effect," one that, I would add, combines with moments of rhyme like "to knowyn & to trowyn" as well as the extended length of each sentence, inviting an experience akin to Margery's clamor itself, an experience of sounds rather than language.[41]

In this way, the *Book*'s final prayer, so closely tied to Margery's own voice, approaches the ebullient and clamorous noise it has identified with its protagonist. Indeed, the multilingualism, anaphora, and parallel structure of the sentence largely structures the entire prayer, extending into its remaining pages as Kempe names the individuals and groups for whom she prays with the phrase "I cry 3ow mercy." The phrase, which appears no fewer than ten times in succession, evokes the clamorous tears particular to Kempe's echoic mysticism in its repetition of "cry." Building from this repeated phrase, the prayer briefly offers a tantalizing multilingual pun that stresses both the *Book*'s Pentecostal multilingualism and its interest in sounds. After her repeated cries for mercy, Margery ultimately shifts to gratitude, saying, "Gra-mercy, Lord, for all þo synnys þat þu hast kept me fro whech I haue not do, and gra-mercy, Lord, for al þe sorwe þat þu hast 3ouyn me, for þo þat I haue do, for þes gracys & for alle oþer graces which arn nedful to me & to alle þe creaturys in erth" (253). On the face of it, with the French-inflected Middle English word "gramerci," these lines offer thanks to God for keeping Margery from sin, for the sorrows she has experienced, and for all the grace he has offered her. Yet they also hearken back to the repetition of the English "I cry þe mercy," evoking a varied request to God that he "grant mercy." In doing so, this multilingual pun simultaneously thanks God for suffering at the same time that it invites compassion in its petition for mercy. The complex layers of meaning—both semantic and affective—that emerge from this final prayer are characteristic of Margery's clamorous style, which gives voice and experience to feeling: the sounds of the language on the page and the compassion they incite. Here, Kempe's shout is also her song.

41. Hsy, *Trading Tongues*, 153.

Kempe's Echoic Legacy

In text, as in life, Margery Kempe's clamorous style generated considerable concern among her audience, as the manuscript's marginalia make clear. A number of scholars have studied the *Book*'s marginalia, highlighting how Kempe's readers have responded to, and to varying degrees worked to tame and contain, her narrative.[42] The *Book*'s marginal annotations and glosses reveal a fundamental tension: its annotators consistently seek to impose order on the text, rendering it pointedly legible rather than immediate and impressionistic. Yet, at the same time, as the "nota de clamore" that I used to open this chapter attests, certain notes suggest that the *Book*'s clerical readers noticed and sought to allow space for Kempe's aurality and boisterous voice.

Joel Fredell has distinguished six separate annotators of the *Book*, including the "Little Brown" annotator, who "notes the clamor" of Kempe's text, as well as three separate hands writing in red ink; of these three, the Red Ink Annotator is the latest and shows the most variety in annotation. Fredell identifies similar objectives among all of the manuscript's scribes and annotators to note episodes that would follow a recognizable hagiographic form. Little Brown, for example, imposes what Fredell calls a "hagiographical superstructure" to the narrative, adding *notae* next to episodes like Margery's first major fit, her visionary confession to John the Baptist, etc.[43] Similarly, the Big Red N Annotator points to episodes that could come together to form a *passio* narrative of Kempe's "martyrdom" by slander. These impulses to read Kempe's text as a conventional saint's life testify to a perspective that seeks to overlook the clamorous elements of her narrative, shaping it into a more readily recognizable and pointedly didactic literary form.

The editorial tendency among these annotators to break up sentences and mark the start of new sections with paraphs attests to a similar purpose. While it is not without punctuation, the manuscript of Kempe's *Book* very rarely offers any indication of a definitive stop or pause, underscoring the

42. George R. Keiser, "The Mystics and the Early English Printers: The Economics of Devotionalism," in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Papers Read at Dartington Hall July 1987*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987), 9. On early printing as efforts to "silence" Margery, see A. E. Goodman, "The Piety of John Brunham's Daughter of Lynn," in *Medieval Women*, ed. Derek Baker and Rosalind M. T. Hill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), 357–58. Lynn Staley shows how the Red Ink Annotator (which Fredell later emends to multiple annotators, all writing in red ink) attempts to impose order on Kempe's narrative by organizing it into generic categories. Similarly, Wynken de Worde's early edition heavily excerpted the original manuscript, organizing Kempe's chaotic narrative into quartos. For a full description and account of the marginalia in Kempe's *Book*, see Fredell, "Design and Authorship."

43. Fredell, "Design and Authorship," 9.

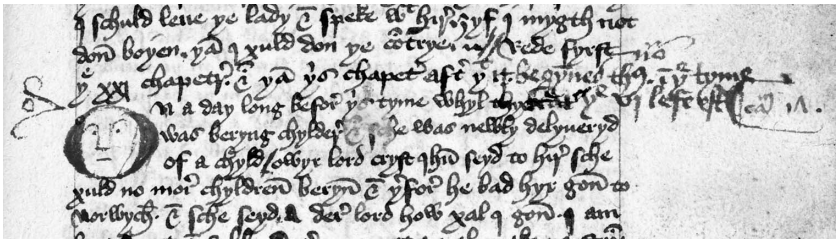

Figure 3. Marginalia from *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Lynn, ca. 1440. The Red Ink Annotator attempts to order Kempe's narrative by directing readers to read in a more chronological order. © The British Library Board, MS Additional 61823, folio 19r.

effusive excess of its narrative voice with what Lynn Staley has called a "flood of language."[44] Later readers of the manuscript add brackets and other punctuation in an attempt to shore up this flood. The Ruby Paraph Annotator, whose sole annotations are paraph markers in a distinctive color of red ink, orders the narrative by indicating the beginning of important episodes. Similarly, at moments where the manuscript doubles back in time, the Red Ink Annotator imposes a more chronological order on the narrative by directing readers to a more concurrent chapter. When chapter 17 begins "On a day long before this time," following an encounter with Archbishop Arundel in chapter 16, the Red Ink Annotator directs readers to a more concurrent chapter with the words, "It begins thus 'in the time' the vi lefe efter" (figure 3).[45]

He often adds his own large paraph annotation in the margin to propose a break in the narrative when these large temporal gaps occur within individual chapters. This occurs, for example, in chapter 18, when Kempe transitions from recounting a discussion between Margery and her confessor in Lynn into an entirely separate memory of a widow disbelieving Margery's spiritual authority, using the phrase "On a tyme beforne" to indicate the non sequitur.[46]

Likewise, the Red Ink Annotator frequently adds or changes language, insisting that Kempe's descriptions of intimate or pleasurable experiences take place with the spiritual realm of the inner senses rather than the worldly domain of the physical body. In one of the *Book*'s most sensually effusive chapters, in which Margery experiences *languor amoris*, exchanges vows of marriage with God, and welcomes otherworldly dust motes with a

44. Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*, 98.
45. BL, MS Additional 61823, chap. 17, fol. 19r.
46. BL, MS Additional 61823, chap. 18, fol. 22v.

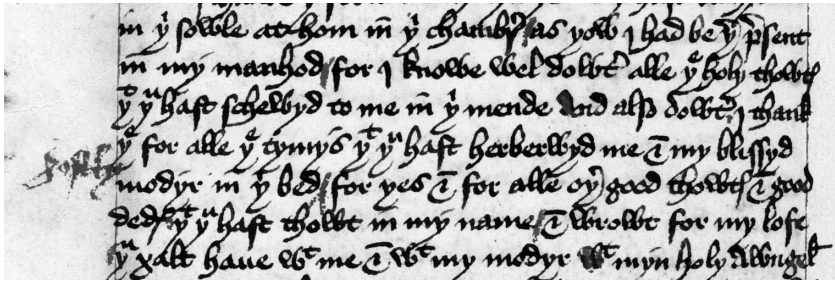

Figure 4. Marginalia from *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Lynn, ca. 1440. The Red Ink Annotator adds "gostly" at a moment when Jesus thanks Kempe for harboring him and his mother in her bed. © The British Library Board, MS Additional 61823, folio 103v.

sacramental Latin benediction, the *Book* describes how "the Fader tok hir be the hand in hir soule." Next to the word "hand" in this passage, the Red Ink Annotator adds "gostly," insisting that Margery's intimacy with God is spiritual rather than worldly.[47] The word "gostly" appears even more explicitly calculated to minimize the physicality of Kempe's accounts when it appears again in red next to a section where Jesus appears to Margery, thanking her for harboring him and his "blessyd modir" in her bed (figure 4).[48]

At times, this corrective impulse to place Margery's experiences within a spiritual realm seems to silence her voice quite literally, as when the Red Ink Annotator writes "sylance" just above a passage that describes how Margery "wept wonder sore" at a vision (figure 5).[49] This addition is consistent with his haste to specify that her mystical perception takes place in her soul rather than with the base senses of her body.

An early edition of the *Book*, printed by Wynken de Worde, extends similar efforts to shape Kempe's text into a didactic narrative by downplaying Margery as a character and foregrounding the speech of Christ. This edition heavily excerpts Kempe's original manuscript, organizing Kempe's chaotic narrative into quartos. It excises Kempe's voice almost entirely from the narrative and downplays her demonstrative physical displays of piety to focus instead on the direct speech of the Godhead.[50] The title page of de Worde's edition, for example, declares the book to be "a shorte treasyse of contemplacyon by oure lorde Jhesu cryste / or taken out of the boke of Margerie

47. BL, MS Additional 61823, chap. 35, fol. 43r.

48. BL, MS Additional 61823, chap. 86, fol. 103v.

49. BL, MS Additional 61823, chap. 35, fol. 42v.

50. Rebecca Schoff Erwin, "Early Editing of Margery Kempe in Manuscript and Print," *Journal of the Early Book Society* 9 (2006): 75–94.

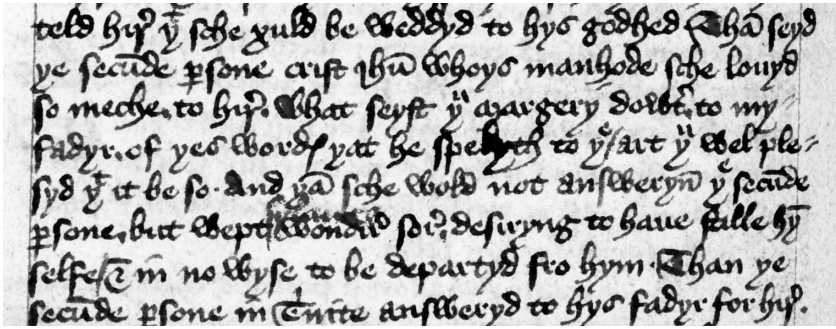

Figure 5. Marginalia from *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Lynn, ca. 1440. The Red Ink Annotator adds "sylance" above a passage describing how Kempe "wept wonder sore." © The British Library Board, MS Additional 61823, folio 42v.

Kempe of lyn." In keeping with this declaration that the book's author is Christ himself, the first page alone reads as a compiled series of first-person snippets of direct discourse from Jesus to Kempe, which appear without any clear narrative order, for example, "Daughter, thou mayst no better please God than to thynke contynually in his love" and "haue mynde of thy wyckedness and thynke on my goodnes."[51] This formatting suggests that de Worde sought to impose order on noise, mediating Kempe's curiously hybrid narrative of spiritual autobiography into a more recognizable generic form of compiled exemplary maxims.

Yet even as such editorial interventions point to a concern about the excessive physicality of Kempe's voice, other details—like Little Brown's "nota de clamore"—seem to leave room for her clamor. The Red Ink Annotator, too, is attuned to Margery's voice. As Kathryn Kerby-Fulton has recently shown, the Red Ink Annotator's marginalia suggest an earnest desire to understand the source of Margery Kempe's mystical experiences. In doing so, he subjects her text to an almost legal level of scrutiny in a process that resembles an ecclesiastical court's *discretio* or discernment of spirits.[52] I do not quite subscribe to Kerby-Fulton's totalizing proclamation that "the wonderful thing about this [Red Ink] annotator's work is that never do we find any misogyny in it." Misogyny can take more subtle and insidious forms when its object is

51. Margery Kempe, *Here begynneth a shorte treatyse of contemplacyon taught by our lorde Jhesu cryste, or taken out of the boke of Margerie kempe of lyn[n]*, ed. Wynken de Worde (London: Fleetstreet, 1501).

52. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, "Professional Readers at Work: Annotators, Editors, and Correctors in Middle English Literary Texts," in Kerby-Fulton, Hilmo, and Olson, *Opening Up Middle English Manuscripts*, 234–39.

femininity—in this case "excess" sensuality—rather than women in general.[53] Yet Kerby-Fulton's work to temper this scribe's reputation from authoritarian patriarch to, in her language, "hopeful skepti[c]" is worth highlighting and developing.

Indeed, the Red Ink Annotator indicates attention and respect for the spiritual authority that the *Book* affords to Margery, including, perhaps, some attunement to Margery's emphasis on aurality. His attention to chapter 36, which I have argued is crucial in Kempe's adaptation of Rolle's echoic mysticism, is particularly suggestive. In this chapter, God tells Margery of her special privilege to speak with her mouth, noting that while he is usually more pleased with prayer that is thought rather than spoken, he "wyl not be displesyd wyth þe whedir þu thynke, sey, or speke" (90). Next to the following passage, in which God and Margery are "homely" as man and wife, the Red Ink Annotator has added a heart with a characteristic trefoil design (figure 6), which Fredell has suggested had a shared meaning among a small group of Carthusian annotators.[54] It would seem that the Red Ink Annotator singled out this passage of particular importance to Carthusian interests and spirituality.

A subsequent annotation reinforces this interest and gestures to the Red Ink Annotator's esteem for Margery Kempe's voice. Chapter 36 ends with Margery hearing the voice of God as a bellows, and then as a dove and a robin, in what I have suggested is a translation of Pentecost calculated to authorize her homiletic clamor. At the chapter rubric that immediately follows the scene, the Red Ink Annotator has drawn three lines between the monogram of Jesus Christ that fills its initial letter and the chapter heading (figure 6).[55]

As relatively rare marks—I could find no other examples in the *Book*—they are worth noting. They may well be coincidental. Or they may indicate something as yet undiscovered. But they may also work to represent and reinforce a direct junction between God and Margery Kempe, expressed in the homely image of the first line of chapter 37 as God tells Margery that she is so obedient to his will that she "cleuy[s]" to him "as þe skyn of stockfysche cleuyth to a mannys handys" (91). But I would suggest that it is also important that these lines are placed at the heels of a critical scene in chapter 36, which combines an intense and visceral love of Christ with an auditory mysticism and links such networks of feeling to Pentecost in a gesture to

53. Kerby-Fulton, "Professional Readers at Work," 238.

54. Fredell, "Design and Authorship," 7.

55. BL, MS Additional 61823, chap. 37, fol. 44v.

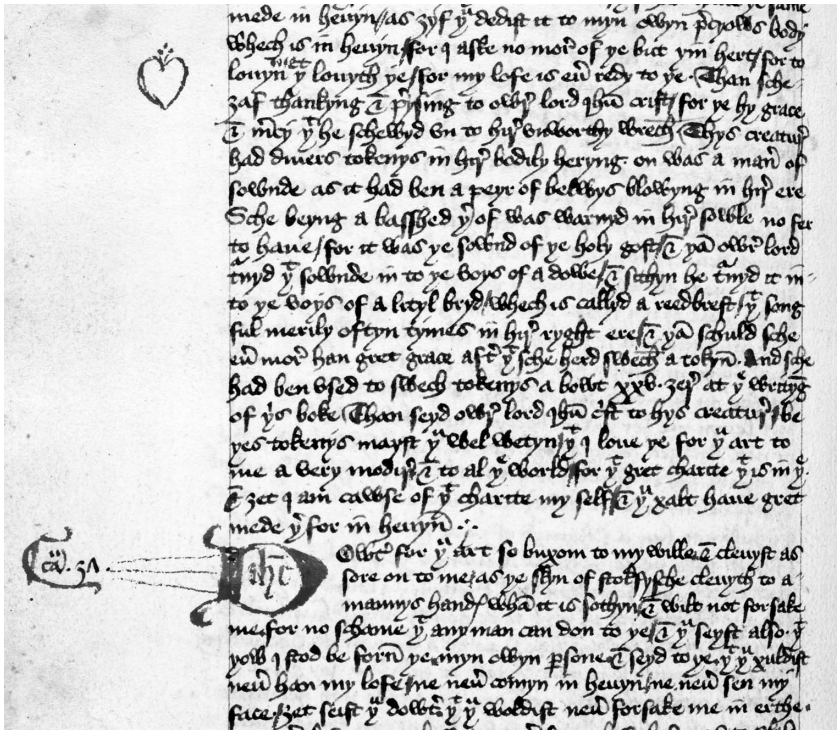

Figure 6. Marginalia from *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Lynn, ca. 1440. A Carthusian trefoil heart next to a passage in which Christ expresses love for Margery. In the chapter heading immediately following Kempe's "domestication" of the biblical scene of Pentecost, the Red Ink Annotator adds lines connecting a monogram of Jesus Christ in the rubricated first letter to the chapter heading. © The British Library Board, MS Additional 61823, folio 44v.

authorize Margery Kempe's voice. The marginalia reinforce this dynamic. The Trinitarian motif of the Carthusian trefoil heart reemerges as a trio of lines that links the name of Christ to the text-marker. The lines underscore a material link between Christ and the textuality of the *Book*, reinforcing the direct attachment between the voice of God and the voice of Kempe's text.

This afterlife undoubtedly shows how Margery Kempe's voice was persistently subjected to containment and governance among those with conventional literacy and power in the century or so after her *Book*'s composition. Yet such persistent efforts also attest to the irrepressible nature of her voice—its capacity to interrupt and exceed established linguistic and communicative modes. This irrepressibility may be one reason why Margery was so often denounced as radically unorthodox, or, in the words of a crowd of monks at Canterbury, a "fals lollare" (26). Kempe's emphasis on an immediate knowledge of God without the mediation of clerical authority was in

line with one of the central tenets of the Wycliffites, also called lollards. Yet the visceral and bodily nature of Kempe's experience—which she both experienced and expressed as noise—was problematic to Wycliffite thinkers. Indeed, just as lay religiosity was undertaking a shift toward more immediate and sense-based epistemologies, the rise of the Wycliffite heresy brought the issue of sound's interaction with sense to the forefront of English culture. If *The Book of Margery Kempe* offers a theology and poetics of noise in relation to busy "werkyng," William Langland's *Piers Plowman* theorizes noise and poetic voice, at least in part, in relation to a slow and elongated idleness as he works to think through and justify the sounds of poetry.

Chapter 3

"Wondres to Here"

Noise, Soundplay, and Langland's Poetics of Lolling in the Time of Wyclif

> His look went from brooder's beard to carper's skull, to remind, to chide them not unkindly, then to the baldpink lollard costard, guiltless, though maligned.
>
> —James Joyce, *Ulysses*, "Scylla and Charybdis" (156)

In all versions of *Piers Plowman*, the poem's opening lines stress hearing before vision. Will, the Dreamer, sets out on his spiritual quest in early summer, dressed in the rough woolen garments of a hermit. Equipped in this way, he goes "forth in the world wondres to here, / And say many selles and selkouthe thynges."[1] Hearing receives emphasis again at the close of the *Prologue*, when the last lines devolve into a cacophony of street songs sung by the urban tradesmen and professionals that populate the end of Will's dream. *Piers Plowman* draws on and reworks the dream-vision topos of birds lulling a dreamer to sleep (or, in the case of Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, waking him up) in any number of places, including in the first dream, when Will falls asleep at the sound of rushing water that "sweye[s] so murye" (A. *Prol*. 10; B. *Prol*. 10) or later on when he confesses that "Blisse of þe briddes abide me made / . . . Murþe of hire mouþes made me þer to slepe" (B. 8. 64–67; C. 10. 63–66; variation appears in A. 9. 58).

1. William Langland, *Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition of the C-text*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2008), C. *Prol*. 3–4. All further quotations from the C text of *Piers Plowman* will be cited from this edition by passus and line number in the text, unless otherwise noted. I have also consulted *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C, and Z Versions*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (London: Longman, 1995). All citations from the A and B texts will be included parenthetically in-text from this edition.

In a poem whose genre depends on its narrative of vision, this emphasis on hearing is somewhat surprising.[2] In stressing sounds the way it does, the poem extends the visionary emphasis on listening we have seen in Rolle and Kempe, figuring Will's pilgrimage for moral and spiritual truth as a process of hearing what the world has to tell him, as well as seeing its marvels.[3]

As we have seen in the echoic mysticism of Rolle and Kempe, hearing is inextricably tied to feeling, both as sensation and as emotion.[4] *Piers Plowman* has been an important text in the critical conversation on medieval visionary literature and its expression of affective spiritual epistemologies. Like Rolle before and Kempe after him, Langland works to theorize the affective importance of voice through an emphasis on inarticulate or, for Langland "idle" language, that is, words—sometimes badly pronounced, or without adequate interior investment—that seem to mean nothing and amount to little more than sounds. Scholars tend to agree that Will's search for experiential ways of knowing shapes some of the poem's most important episodes and themes.[5] In the C text, Langland works through his ideas on slow time in relation to sound and language in his added passages on *lollares* and lolling. Langland's *lollares* have attracted scholarly attention largely for their suggestive dramatization of contemporaneous debates around poverty and mendicancy.[6] My concern here is not so much to contribute to debates

2. Tekla Bude has productively explored the role of sound and the sense of hearing in *Piers Plowman*, with particular attention to the ways that Langland develops the ideas of Richard Rolle concerning interplays of hearing and tasting. It my aim to push such explorations of sound and listening in *Piers Plowman* more emphatically toward language and poetics, in particular the relationship between sound and sense. See Bude, *"Panis Angelorum."*

3. For the connection between Rolle's and Langland's devotional practices, see Ralph Hanna, "Will's Work," in *Written Work: Langland, Labor, and Authorship*, ed. Steven Justice and Katherine Kerby-Fulton (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 46.

4. For an overview of this recent emphasis in medieval studies, see Sarah McNamer, "Feeling," in Strohm, *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature*, 241–57. For an important treatment of feeling in *Piers Plowman*, see Stephanie Trigg, "Langland's Tears: Poetry, Emotion, and Mouvance," *YLS* 26 (2012): 27–48.

5. See James Simpson, "From Reason to Affective Knowledge: Modes of Thought and Poetic Form in *Piers Plowman*," *Medium Aevum* 55 (1986): 1–23. Simpson returns to the issue in "Desire and the Scriptural Text: Will as Reader in *Piers Plowman*," in *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages*, ed. Rita Copeland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 215–43. For a more recent book-length study of *Piers Plowman* and desire, see Nicollette Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). While Zeeman touches on the role of affect in medieval theories of cognition only at certain moments in her book, I have found her overall treatment of the role of "desire" (along with suffering and failure) as an important epistemological mode in *Piers Plowman* to be very helpful in framing my own treatment of sound as a medium of deferral and delay.

6. For scholarship aiming to locate Langland's *lollares* in these debates, see Wendy Scase, *Piers Plowman and the New Anticlericalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 125–37 and 155; Anne Middleton, "Acts of Vagrancy: The C Version 'Autobiography' and the Statute of 1388," in Justice

about whether Langland's *lollares* represent actual Wycliffites; many scholars have already done so, and much better than I can here.[7] Rather, I will call attention to the relation of Langland's *lollares* to late medieval ideas about sound, sense, and the physical pleasures of language, concepts that animated debates around the Wycliffite heresy during this period.

Fiona Somerset has stressed the importance of considering "loll" as a verb in understanding late medieval lollard writing, the dissenting literature produced by the followers of John Wyclif. In doing so, she highlights the verb's dual connotations—both positive and negative—in lollard and antilollard literature.[8] I am particularly interested in her identification of the word's contradictory nuances with respect to time: its associations both with the positive conception of "spending time in reflection" and the negative notion of "wasting time on dubious activities."[9] In all of the versions of the poem, Langland expresses concern about idleness in the search for spiritual knowledge and the pursuit of a morally just life. This preoccupation is evident in his persistent concern with idle language: that which, as I argue in this chapter, emerges from a lazy will and so amounts to sound alone or noise. Yet it is this very temporal lengthening and delay that proves spiritually useful for Langland, allowing the notion of lolling to take on the more positive associations with meditation and reflection. For Langland, the term *lollare* signals a broad social and religious identity based on the embrace of theatricality, multiplicity, and physical experience, including play with the sounds

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and Kerby-Fulton, *Written Work*, 284–87; Derek Pearsall, "Langland and Lollardy: From B to C," *YLS* 17 (2003), especially 11–13. Pearsall revisits the topic in "'Lunatyk Lollers' in *Piers Plowman*," in *Religion in the Poetry and Drama of the Late Middle Ages in England: The J. A. W. Memorial Lectures, Perugia, 1988*, ed. Piero Boitani and Ana Torti (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990), 163–78. For a useful summary of critical and historical perspectives on lollardy and its relation to *Piers Plowman*, see Robert Adams, *Langland and the Rokele Family: The Gentry Background to Piers Plowman* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013), 98 at n. 55. See also the special issue of *YLS* 17 (2003) dedicated to "Langland and Lollardy."

7. See Andrew Cole, *Literature and Heresy in the Age of Chaucer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 25–71. Cole argues that Langland "reinvents" the idea of the lollard as a social type and gives the word dual connotations, first by recuperating and appropriating the word as an "ideal form of apostleship" (40) and also by developing the notion of the *lollare* to refer to those friars he deemed to be a material and economic drain on society. This point of view is opposed to that of scholars like Wendy Scase, who has argued that Langland's *lollares* have nothing to do with Wycliffites, and instead serve as a means of making distinctions between good and bad mendicancy as a form of labor, as the number of untrained friars begging for alms proliferated in the postplague landscape of late medieval England.

8. Fiona Somerset, *Feeling Like Saints: Lollard Writings after Wyclif* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 18–20.

9. Somerset, *Feeling Like Saints*, 19. For a fuller treatment of the temporality of lolling as it pertains to the doctrine of salvation in *Piers Plowman*, see Micah James Goodrich, "Lolling and the Suspension of Salvation in *Piers Plowman*," *YLS* 33 (2019): 13–42.

and feelings of language. Ultimately Langland articulates what I will call a poetics of lolling: a mode of poetic attention or attunement that pushes language into the realm of noise, emphasizing its material and sensory qualities. This lolling poetics in turn extends the process of interpretation and expands the fullness of meaning it produces.

Langland's poetics of lolling contributed to the aural and textual conditions from which Wycliffite and anti-Wycliffite debates about the relationship between sound and sense emerged at the end of the fourteenth century and into the fifteenth.[10] Both sides of these debates accused their opponents of idle talk and warned against superficial readings of scripture that overlooked divine intention for the sake of its sounds. Yet, as the anonymous fifteenth-century poem *Mum and the Sothsegger* will suggest, later poets in the *Piers Plowman* tradition took up Langland's ethical investment in the noise of poetry as a language of experience uniquely suited to lay social critique.

Intention and Lazy Articulation in the B-Text Confession of Sloth

In composing the A and B texts of *Piers Plowman*, Langland drew on longstanding philosophical concerns about the ways that sound could overtake sense in order to critique the "empty" speech that he associated with idle spiritual devotion. Langland's treatment of Sloth stresses how he considers noise—sound without substance—to be an outcome of spiritual disengagement or slothfulness. Yet even as the episode expresses this anxiety, it also begins to suggest how the Dreamer turns to the aural and embodied aspects of language—to an experience of language as noise—in order to draw himself closer to spiritual truth.

Passus 5 of the B text begins as Will awakes from his vision of Meed at the King's court, feeling intellectually and spiritually unsatisfied, and lamenting that he has not "ysei3en more" (B. 5. 4). Significantly, Will responds to this failure of vision by turning to the aural texture of language, in order to achieve a deeper spiritual knowledge. He picks up his rosary and prays, telling us, "i sat softely adoun and seide my bileue; / And so I bablede on

10. An earlier version of this chapter, which appeared in *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, made a different argument: that Langland's poetics of lolling responded to the writings of Wyclif and his followers. A closer examination of historical chronology has convinced me that the reverse is more likely true. I am grateful to Fiona Somerset for her expertise and advise on this matter. See Adin E. Lears, "Noise, Sound-play and Langland's Poetics of Lolling in the Time of Wyclif," *SAC* 38 (2016): 165–200.

my bedes, þei brouȝte me aslepe" (B. 5. 7–8). On the face of it at least, the soporific effect of Will's prayer calls the interior investment of his apparently rote devotional practices into question. Significantly, Langland uses the word *bablen*, an echoic word marked by a repetition of consonants that enacts the noisemaking it signifies.[11] In doing so, he draws on a contemporaneous concern with slothful prayer, thought to be ungrounded in the will or intention of the supplicant.

Langland's clearest condemnation of such slothful prayer is in his treatment of "spilled speech" (a mode of lazily articulated prayer) in B 9. Here, Wit outlines an ideal life of "do best":

> He dooþ best þat wiþdraweþ hym by daye and by nyȝte
> To spille any speche or any space of tyme:
> *Qui offendit in vno in omnibus est reus*.
> [Tynynge] of tyme, truþe woot þe soþe,
> Is moost yhated vpon erþe of hem þat ben in heuene;
> And siþþe to spille speche þat [spire] is of grace
> And goddes gleman and a game of heuene.
> Wolde neyere þe feiþful fader [h]is fiþele were vntempred
> Ne his gleman a gedelyng, a goere to tauernes.
>
> (B. 9. 97–104)

J. A. Burrow has suggested that Langland draws here on homiletic depictions of the word-collecting demon, Tutivillus, a character frequently cited in homilies and moral treatises alongside the sin of sloth and references to "idle" talk, particularly in church.[12] Though exempla on Tutivillus occur in varying types, the one relevant to this instance in *Piers Plowman* concerns a holy man who encounters the demon carrying a heavy bag of all the "faylynges, & of neglygences" in the words and syllables of psalms and verses that are mumbled in church, intent to present each misarticulation to God on the sinner's day of reckoning.[13] "Spilled" words then—which Wit likens

11. For a discussion of how these onomatopoetic words signal speech without "interior investment," see Zieman, *Singing the New Song*, 75–76.

12. J. A. Burrow, "Wasting Time, Wasting Words in Piers Plowman B and C," *YLS* 17 (2003): 192. On the influence of Tutivillus in the Middle Ages, see Margaret Jennings, "Tutivillus: The Literary Career of the Recording Demon," *Studies in Philology* 74, no. 5 (1977): 1–95. See also Kathy Cawsey, "Tutivillus and the 'Kyrkchaterars': Strategies of Control in the Middle Ages," *Studies in Philology* 102, no. 4 (2005): 434–51.

13. Though the demon's collection of fragmented words appears throughout all versions of this type, this phrase is taken from an account in J. H. Blunt, ed., *The Myroure of Our Ladye* (London: EETS, 1873), 54.

to a fiddle that is "vntempred" or out-of-tune—are about the deficient misarticulation of a lazy supplicant: one who prays piecemeal, perhaps amidst whispers of gossip or local news.[14] Langland's "babbling" Dreamer evokes this mode of misarticulated or untempered prayer. Speech that lacks an active will (or, in this case, an active Will) is simply sound without substance: noise.

The idea of noise as an outcome of a slothful will comes into focus with the confession of Sloth who, in keeping with his tardy nature, brings up the rear of Langland's procession of sins. After "babbling on his beads" lulls Will to sleep, his second vision begins with the entrance of an authoritative allegorical figure (in the A text Conscience and in B and C Reason) who preaches a fire-and-brimstone sermon, exhorting a wide array of folk to repent and abandon their sinful ways before they provoke the wrath of God. At the end of his sermon, a personification of Repentance enters, undertaking to hear the confessions of the seven sins. Nearly every sin in the procession is inarticulate in some way, in most cases either in conjunction with or because of some deficiency or deformation of the body. Envy, for example, is so distended with wrath that he bites his lips in speaking (B. 5. 83–85). Yet more than any of the other sins, it is Sloth that Langland links to noise. Ultimately, Sloth's noisemaking indicates the figure's lack of spiritual investment, his misplaced orientation toward his own desire in a way that resonates precariously with the Dreamer's own babbling prayer at the beginning of the episode.

Sloth begins by shamelessly admitting "Sholde no ryngynge do me ryse ar I were rype to dyne" (B. 5. 390). By ignoring the village bells that structure time and call the community to worship, Sloth proves himself a "bad" listener—one who ignores injunctions to participate in social life in favor of his own pleasures, in this case his appetite for food.[15] In keeping with this mislistening—this absorption of sound without its corresponding meaning—Sloth has nothing of substance to say. In fact, he tends to make noise. Immediately following his admission of mislistening, he begins his confession by making a series of loud noises: "He bigan *Benedicte* with a

14. In its disruption of ecclesiastical order, "spilling speech" overlaps and interacts with gossip, another form of speech widely denounced as "idle talk" in the Middle Ages. Though she does not discuss gossip in terms of misarticulation or noise, Susan E. Phillips has explored late medieval treatments of gossip, with emphasis on pastoral and homiletic contexts. See Phillips, *Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late-Medieval England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), especially 13–63.

15. For a discussion of the semantic role of bells in marking time and building community in the Middle Ages, see Arnold and Goodson, "Resounding Community."

bolk, and his brest knokked, / And raxed and rored, and rutte at þe laste" (B. 5. 391–92). Sloth's subsequent belch, chest-thump, and roaring yawn as he initiates the confessional formula call his actual penitence into question, reinforcing Langland's associations between noise and lack of intention or emotional-intellectual investment with words. Indeed, Sloth later confesses to breaking oaths ("I have made vowes fourty and foryete hem on the morne," B. 5. 398) and notes that with the exception of prayer motivated by wrath, "That I tell wiþ my tongue is two myle fro myn herte" (B. 5. 402).

The correspondence between speaking without intention and noisy misarticulation becomes clearer as Sloth stresses his incomplete or imperfect articulation of prayer and other penitential speech: "I can noughte parfitly my Paternoster as the prest hit syngeþ" (B. 5. 395), he admits. Likewise, he confesses his sins so seldom that he must "gesse" at them when he goes to recall them (B. 5. 415). Sloth is ignorant of spiritually edifying texts like saints' lives or sermons, but instead focuses on stories like "rymes of Robyn hode and of Randolf erle of Chestre" (B. 5. 396–97). His days are spent telling "ydel tales atte ale and otherwhile in cherches" (B. 5. 404)—a phrase whose lilting rhythm and internal rhyme amplifies the physicality and worldliness of the songs it describes. In his disruptive church chatter, which inhibits his articulation of prayer, Sloth resembles those sinners attended by the demon Tutivillus, who collects their overskipped and syncopated syllables for the day of reckoning. Indeed, Langland intensifies Sloth's misarticulation by linking him to the passage discussed above in which Wit contrasts silent contemplation with "spilled speech." When he asks Repentance for pardon, Sloth confesses "Sixty siþes Y, Sleuþe, haue foryete hit siþþe; / In speche and in sparynge of speche[,] yspilt many a tyme" (B. 5. 435–36).[16]

By tying Sloth's noise to "spilled speech" and misarticulation in this way, the poem places the Dreamer's babbling in uncomfortable juxtaposition with the sin, reinforcing the potentially dangerous and overly physical nature of his prayer. Yet it would be too hasty to say that the poem presents Will—or his babbling—as a wholly negative example in this section. Again, it is worth noting that Will turns to babble after his first vision fails to offer him visionary clarity or spiritual knowledge. Coupled with this section's mistrust of language without intention, Will's turn to prayer as an experience that deepens his visionary capacity suggests Langland's ambivalence about how the aural texture of language could help or hinder the search for spiritual

16. I emend Schmidt's editorial addition of a semicolon between "speche" and "yspilt" to a comma to make it clearer that "yspilt" can refer back to "speche" as well as forward to the "flesh and fissh" (B. 5. 437) and other foods that Sloth admits to wasting.

knowledge. It is these tensions around the sounded and felt aspects of language that preoccupy Langland in some of his most significant revisions of the C text, especially those that center around his depiction of wandering *lollares* and *lunatyk lollares* in passus 9.

Lollares, Lolling, and Lazy Sounds

In the A and B texts of *Piers Plowman*, the word *lollare* and its variants appear very seldom. The noun *lollare* never appears in the A text and appears only once in B as Anima describes Piers the Plowman to Will by telling him that Piers "nys no3t in lolleris ne in londleperis heremytes" (B. 15. 213).[17] Here, and elsewhere in A and B, *lollares* and lolling are linked to the idle work-avoidance of certain mendicant preachers—an association that draws attention to the misdirection of their wills toward material rather than spiritual things. Yet despite these persistent associations with time-wasting, Langland does not dismiss lolling entirely. In B 16, for example, Will observes a "lazar" or leper in the lap of Abraham, here personified as Faith. In this curious staging of the biblical bosom of Abraham—a place of solace where the righteous dead await judgment—Langland's leper lies along with "patriarkes and profetes, pleyinge togideres" (B. 16. 255–56).[18] When Will inquires about the scene, Abraham explains that only Christ can save them "or [they] ligge þus evere / Lollynge in [Abraham's] lappe" (B. 16. 268–69). Here, lolling is equivalent to waiting: a state of suspension prior to the perfect bliss of heaven.[19] Yet, as Langland's earlier invocation of "pleyinge" reminds us, such a lolling state is one of comfort and pleasure in the company of others. Thus, for Langland, lolling is a quintessentially human state of being: one that can be socially wasteful or spiritually sustaining.

Langland builds from these complex and contradictory valences of lolling in some of his most noteworthy C-text additions as he takes pains to distinguish between greedy and deceptive *lollares* and a different and more positive kind of "lunatyk lollare" who seems to have greater access to spiritual truth. The origin and meaning of the term *lollare* has been an area of major debate

17. For a list of Langland's uses of *lollare* and its variants, including instances I do not discuss explicitly in this section, see "lollare" n. and "lolleþ" v. in Joseph F. Wittig, ed., *Piers Plowman Concordance* (London: Athlone Press, 2001).

18. See, for example, Luke 16:22.

19. For a rich and suggestive treatment of this section of the poem that identifies the possibility for a salvific idleness in which "lolling and hanging are conditions of hope," see Goodrich, "Lolling and the Suspension of Salvation," 30.

in Langland studies.[20] In addition to showing his investment in late medieval debates about poverty and mendicancy, Langland's *lollares* signal a broader engagement with problems of language and interpretation that would come to be a fundamental preoccupation in Wycliffite and anti-Wycliffite writing alike. Here I will show how Langland applies the complex associations of idle lolling to the sounds of language in his treatment of *lollares* and in his poetry more broadly.

Somerset highlights how the word *lollare* is frequently associated with the verb *lollen*, whose connotations in Middle English encompassed a range of moral perspectives on idleness: from lazy work avoidance to a more positive connotation of contemplative reflection, at a remove from the world. Indeed, the first attested usage of the verb *lollen* in the *MED* is in Langland's A text, and his C text shows a concerted effort to define the term *lollare*. Somerset cautiously suggests that despite Langland's claim to earlier usage in the C text, the verb and the noun may have been coined in Middle English around the same time and that Langland was influential in their invention and dissemination.[21] Andrew Cole, too, has suggested that Langland was a prime mover in "reinventing" the term *lollare*, recuperating the word to refer to an apostolic ideal of patient poverty for the laity.[22] By emphasizing patience as a virtue of such apostolic poverty, Cole inadvertently addresses the idea of lolling in the verbal sense Langland uses to describe the leper in the lap of Abraham. If Langland's more positive *lollares* patiently endure their poverty as they await a spiritual reward, they exist, like those lolling in the lap of Abraham, in a state of suspension and spiritually productive idleness. In his C-text additions on *lollares*, Langland extends the associations with noise as idle talk that he develops in the B text, using the term *lollare* as an imitative or echoic noise word like *bablen*, *janglen*, and more. These noise words signal the empty and duplicitously theatrical speech that he associates with certain false religious, who manipulate church law to conform to their own desires. Yet, as his treatment of the lolling leper above shows, Langland finds the idleness he associates with *lollares* and lolling to be both spiritually and, as we will see, poetically productive.

Over the course of the second vision Will has explored upright governance of the individual soul by witnessing the confession of the seven sins

20. See notes 6 and 7 of this chapter. See also Somerset, *Feeling Like Saints*, 15–16, for a useful overview.

21. Somerset, *Feeling Like Saints*, 19.

22. Cole, *Literature and Heresy*, 46–71.

and encountering the beatific figure of Piers the Plowman. Serving Truth, Piers seeks to manage the winners and wasters of society: those laborers who uphold social order by working diligently for the common good and those "faitours" who care only for their own individual welfare. Just before Truth's pardon, passus 8 of the C text (passus 7 in the B text) closes with an apocalyptic segment that dramatizes the dire famine that will result from such widespread refusal to work. Truth enters the narrative to grant a pardon to those who, like Piers the Plowman, labor for the common good.

It is in this context that Langland adds passages on various types of deserving and undeserving beggars and sketches the life of the *lollare* in an extended passage juxtaposing *lollares* with holy hermits:

> And alle holy eremytes haue shal the same;
> Ac eremytes that inhabiten by the heye weye
> And in borwes among brewesteres and beggen in churches—
> Al that holy ermytes hatede and despisede,
> As rychesses and reuerences and ryche menne almesse—
> Thise lollares, lache-draweres, lewede ermytes
> Coueyten the contrarye, for as coterelles they libbeth.
> For hit ben but boyes, bollares at the ale,
> Noyther of lynage ne of lettrure ne lyf-holy as ermytes
> That wonede whilom in wodes with beres and lyons.
> Summe hadde lyflode of here lynage and of no lyf elles
> And summe lyuede by here lettrure and labour of here handes
> And somme hadde foreynes to frendes that hem fode sente
> And briddes brouhte somme bred that they by lyuede.
> Al they holy ermytes were of heye kynne,
> Forsoken londe and lordschipe and alle lykynges of body.
>
> (C. 9. 188–203)

For Langland, *lollares* are "lewede ermytes," who live in stark contrast to the "holy eremytes" of conventional saints' lives. While *lollares* live in town, "inhabit[ing] by the heye weye / And in borwes among brewesteres and begg[ing] in churches," holy hermits live in the wild, dwelling "in wodes with beres and lyons." There is an irony to Langland's description of these settings. Living away from human contact, holy hermits forsake "alle lykynges of body." And yet Langland implies that their lot is not simply to live a life of the mind. It is also to cultivate relationships to unspeaking creatures: to the bears and lions they dwell with and to the birds who provide them with bread.

With these references to environment and animal companionship, Langland locates holy hermits within a nonverbal world, alluding to an idealized locus of prelapsarian quietude and silence informed, in part, by the theology of mystical silence in the writing of Augustine. This ideal is expressed in various works from antiquity through Langland's present. Chaucer's short poem "The Former Age" speaks of a prior time in which humans lived "in parfit quiete" (44), without the need for labor or technology to provide them with the things necessary for survival. The inhabitants of Chaucer's former age eat "corn up-sprong, unsowe of mannes hond" (10). Langland's holy hermits eat "fode" sent by "frendes" and "bred" offered by "briddes." In the hagiographic literature of the hermit-saints, this ideal of silence sometimes takes the form of nonverbal communication through signs. In the Anglo-Saxon monk Felix of Crowland's Latin *vita* of Saint Guthlac, for example, Felix describes how Guthlac is able to communicate wordlessly with two swallows who enter his hermitage. He places a single straw in a basket to direct the birds where to build their nest. They respond to this, Felix tells us, "as though they had been given instruction by a noted sign" (velut notato signo inbuti).[23] Langland does not explicitly locate his holy hermits in relation to sound or language. Yet his allusion to this tradition gestures to ideals of contemplative silence and the gestural communication that accompanied it.

This allusive link between holy hermits and prelapsarian quietude implicitly links *lollares* with noise. Unlike holy hermits, Langland's *lollares* are "lewd" hermits who wander about in town, feigning religious authority:

> Ac thise ermytes that edifien thus by the heye weye
> Whilen were werkmen, webbes and taylours
> And carteres knaues and clerkes withouten grace,
> Helden full hungry hous and hadde much defaute,
> Long labour and litte wynnynge, and at the laste they aspyde
> That faytede in frere clothinge hadde fatte chekes.
> Forthy lefte they here labour, thise lewede knaues,
> And clothed hem in copes, clerkes as hit were,
> Or oen of som ordre or ells a profete,
> Ayen the lawe he lyueth, yf Latin be trewe
> *Non licet uobis legem voluntati, set voluntatem coniugere legi*
> Kyndeliche, by Crist, ben suche ycald "lollares."

23. *Felix's Life of St. Guthlac*, ed. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 122.

As by the Engelisch of oure eldres, of olde mennes techynge,
He that lolleth is lame or his leg out of ioynte
Or ymaymed in som membre, for to meschief hit souneth,
Rihte so sothly such manere ermytes
Lollen ayen the byleue and the lawe of holy churche.

(C. 9. 204–19)

Though they work hard for "litte wynnynge," the *lollares* refuse to suffer patient poverty. Instead, they follow those who "faytede in frere clothinge [and] hadde fatte chekes." The *lollares* turn to fraud by "cloth[ing] hem in copes, clerkes as hit were, / Or oen of som ordre or ells a profete." The Latin tag—"it is not lawful for you to make the law conform to your will, but rather for you to conform your will to the law"—emphasizes their apostasy from religious law. To masquerade as a friar for personal profit is to overlook God's law, a transcendent truth, allowing oneself to be led by desire for created things rather than Creator. This misdirected orientation privileges the human will over the divine and deceptively manipulates religious law as a sign of divine truth. It is this aspect of the *lollares'* nature, Langland tells us, that gives them their name.

The imaginative etymology that follows further explains the sentiment that *lollares* are so-named "kyndeliche," that is, that their name expresses something fundamental about their nature. According to "the Engelisch of oure eldres," Langland avers, the term *lollare* emerged from the verbal form of the word, referring to those who "loll." Just as those whose lame limbs prevent them from work are *lollares*, so are those lewd hermits whose lazy will lolls away from the belief and law of the church. In this passage it is possible to see how Langland might have drawn from both the Latin *lolia*, "weeds," and the Middle Dutch *lollaert*, "a mumbler," in characterizing his *lollares*, making poetic use of a network of homophonic associations around these terms to construct a fictional identity based in theatricality and a material orientation toward the world.[24] Broadly speaking, in their tendency to masquerade as religious authorities without the properly directed will or intention, Langland's *lollares* are an example of what Anne Middleton calls "religion out of place," inserting the trappings of religious devotion where they do not belong, like weeds among fruit or, as one of Chaucer's pilgrims says, rejecting the Parson's sanctimony, "cokkel in our clene corn" (II. 1183). As Middleton and other scholars remind us, the term *lollare* came to be used

24. For more on the etymology of lollard from the Latin *lolia*, see Cole, *Literature and Heresy*, 78. For more on the etymology from the Dutch *lollaert*, see Cole, *Literature and Heresy*, 160.

not simply to refer to a follower of John Wyclif, but more broadly to critique a lack of decorum in religious practice and expression, particularly that which was perceived to be loud or sanctimonious religious display.[25] Langland's use of the term *lollare* begins to get at the performative quality that would come to be associated with the word in a way that may have been influenced by the sense of the Latin word *lolia*.

The word's other proposed etymology—from the Middle Dutch term *lollaert*, "a mumbler"—is also potentially at play. Cole has dismissed this as a "faux etymology," noting that lollards are dismissed for their loudness rather than for quiet mumbling.[26] Yet I would suggest that, whichever language the word *lollard* came from, Langland's interest in sound and homophonic association may have led him to play not only on the Latinate term *lolia*, but also on the Middle Dutch *lollaert* with its links to inarticulate mumbling. For Langland, the sounds of the word are as important as its sense. In his passages on *lollares*, Langland does not refer explicitly to their voices. He does, however, evoke the sounds of their voices punningly and homophonically when he describes how some *lollares* are "ymaymed in som membre, for to meschief hit souneth." The Middle English verb *sounen* had a remarkably broad semantic range that was fundamentally concerned with the ethical conjunction of intention, word, and action that so preoccupied Langland. Its definitions included "to make sound, noise, or music," as well as "to indicate, reveal, or signify" and "to be concerned with [in deed or action]."[27] Langland draws from this full semantic range, implying that the *lollares* concern themselves with vice and also that their bad behavior signifies it, revealing their vicious intentions. Indeed, this emphasis on externalizing malintent is evident in the line's sense that the *lollares* "proclaim" or "resound" with "mischief," a term that comes to be strongly associated with dangerous speech over the following centuries. In the morality play *Mankind*, for example, the parodic Latinate words of the personified figure Mischief ape the aureate homiletic language of his virtuous counterpart Mercy, even as they devolve into sing-song nonsense that subordinates sense to sounds.[28]

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25. See for example, Anne Middleton's discussion of "lollare" as a "social irritant" and an indicator of "religion out of place" in "Acts of Vagrancy," 280–85.

26. Cole, *Literature and Heresy*, 160.

27. *MED*, s.v. "sounen," https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary.

28. In Mischief's opening speech, he beseeches Mercy, "leve yowr calcacyon. / Leve yowr chaffe, leve yowr corn, leve yowr dalyacyon," then asks Mercy to clarify a question, which he articulates as a nonsense rhyme: "Mysse-masche, dryff-draff, / Sum was corn and sume was chaffe, / My dame seyde my name was Raffe." See John Coldewey, ed., *Early English Drama: An Anthology* (New York: Garland, 1993),

Thus, Langland's *lollares* show or signify their slothful intentions in part through their empty voices, which resound or make noise. Indeed, Langland suggests, this is how they got their name. In both Middle and Modern English, the words "loll" and "lollare"—like "babble," "mumble," and more—belong on the list of imitative or echoic words that enact their own sense. The *OED*, which includes this passage from *Piers Plowman* among its earliest examples, suggests that the word "loll" emerged "apparently due to a sense of the expressiveness of the sound (with the repeated *l*) suggestive of rocking or swinging."[29] In other words, it is not simply the word *lollare*'s semantic associations with lazy lolling that make it "kyndeliche" for Langland. It is also the sounds of the word, which apply the laziness they signify to the tongue and teeth, enacting the idle wills of the beggars to which they refer. In this way, an irony pervades Langland's coinage: the word *lollare* in part denounces empty voices; yet it also extends and enacts such vocalization.

It is, in part, this curious affinity for lolling vocalization—one that recalls Rolle's description of the elongation and slowing of mystical expression—that leads Langland to partially rehabilitate some *lollares* and to identify them with his poetic persona, Will the Dreamer. Langland tells us:

> Ac yut ar ther othere beggares, in hele as hit semeth,
> Ac hem wanteth wyt, men and women bothe,
> The whiche aren lunatyk lollares and lepares aboute
> And madden as the mone sit, more other lasse.
> Careth they for no colde ne counteth of non hete
> And aren meuynge aftur the mone; moneyeles they walke
> With a good will, witteles, mony wyde contreyes,
> Riht as Peter dede and Poul, saue that they preche nat

109. In their outline of the play's dramatis personae for the Arden Shakespeare edition, Douglas Bruster and Eric Rasmussen note that the word "mischief" frequently indicates "aggressive malice hidden from view" in early modern translations of the Hebrew bible and more pointedly "dangerously loose speech" in Psalm 10:7, which in one version reads "His mouth is full of cursing, and of deceate, and of fraude: vnder his tongue is labour and mischiefe." See Douglas Bruster and Eric Rasmussen, eds., *Everyman and Mankind* (London: Methuen, 2009), 87. Langland's reference to the "mischief" of the *lollares* refers far less pointedly to speech than this early bible translation. But the possibility remains that Langland's passage may be an early example of "mischief's" association with spoken vice, a link amplified by the homophonic valences of the verb *sounen*. For more on the use and abuse of language as a focal theme in *Mankind*, see, for example, Lynn Forest-Hill, "*Mankind* and the Fifteenth-Century Preaching Controversy," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 15 (2003): 17–42.

29. *OED*, s.v. "loll" v. 1, https://www.oed.com.

Ne none muracles maken—ac many tymes hem happeth
To profecye of the peple, pleyinge as hit were.

(C. 9. 105–14)

Unlike Langland's wily *lollares*, the *lunatyk lollares* lack finely honed intellectual capacities. Langland affirms this twice with the assertions that they "wan[t] wyt" and are "witteles." It is significant that they "preche nat / Ne none muracles maken" and instead "profecye of the peple, pleyinge as hit were." This emphasis on prophecy is central to the importance of the *lunatyk lollares*.

In examining the Banquet of Conscience episode later in the poem (B. 13; C.15), James Simpson has shown how the speech of Patience moves formally from riddling to prophesy. He argues that these two forms of speech are both "literary mode[s]" linked to poetry, first in the early English tradition of biblical commentary, but also in the drama of the banquet itself. For Simpson, Patience's riddling speech, which is dismissed by the corrupt Doctor of Divinity, stages a contrast between intellective and affective approaches to knowledge, ultimately offering an important example of the poem's overall move "from reason to affective knowledge."[30]

These associations between prophesy and poetry—and their link to enigma later in the poem—are crucial for understanding the *lunatyk lollares* and their enigmatic speech. While this passage does not comment explicitly on the voices of the *lunatyk lollares*, or on their capacity to make noise, the juxtaposition here between prophecy and preaching—an activity we have seen linked to "mischief" and noise in discussions of the other *lollares*—suggests that we can understand the prophecy of the *lunatyk lollares* as a mode of verbal performance akin to preaching. It is, moreover, an oral mode that dilates interpretation and proliferates meaning. The final line of this passage is itself like a riddle. With the enigmatic and hedging phrase "as hit were" we are reminded of language's limitations in communicating ideas. This confusion mirrors the mode of speaking favored by the *lunatyk lollares*. Instead of preaching—or claiming to preach—a clear or unmediated doctrinal truth, they "ple[y]." This term intensifies their embrace of the mimetic or representational aspects of fiction, both dramatic and poetic, including language in its material and aural form.

This link between the *lunatyk lollares* and "pley" may begin to explain why Will the Dreamer—and the poem's narrator—enters at the beginning

30. Simpson, "From Reason to Affective Knowledge," 16–18.

of passus 5 of the C text "yclothed as a lollare" (C. 5. 3). It is fitting that Will's *lollare*-like garments are a way of manipulating—or playing—with surfaces. Shortly after this entrance, Will is forced to justify his own vocation as a scholar and poet in the face of accusations of idleness from Reason, a personification of that mental faculty so often thought to be missing from wrong reading and inarticulate speech. Often labeled the C text's "autobiographical passage," this section has generated much debate among scholars, largely around the degree to which it might correspond to the historical reality of Langland's life.[31] I offer no evidence to link the details of this passage to what we know about who Langland really was as a historical figure. But I do suggest that Will's *lollare* disguise tells us a bit about Langland's literary persona. This costume ties the narrator and supposed composer of the poem to the idea and the sound of *lollares* and *lolling*. In doing so, it identifies the poetic project of the poem, at least in part, to the nexus of associations Langland has developed around these terms. The Dreamer's *lollare* costume is a sign of his lolling will—an orientation toward idleness and delay. It identifies him with those who manipulate or play with the aural texture of language so that sound sometimes overtakes sense, deferring comprehension and rendering interpretation into an experiential physical process.

Langland's added passages on *lollares* and lolling invite readers to ask: What should the relationship between sound and sense be? As I have shown, Langland emphasizes his concern about the idle or even deceptive disjunction between sound and sense in his characterization of Sloth and the *lollares*. Yet ultimately, as his lunatic *lollares* suggest, Langland seeks to rehabilitate sound as the material element of language and to encourage a mode of embodied listening. He does so by articulating a poetics of lolling that invites an experience of language as noise, using its sounds and textures to dilate the process of interpretation and expand the meanings—and meaningfulness—that emerge from it.

Langland's Poetics of Lolling

To recognize and understand Langland's poetics of lolling and the mode of poetic thinking it facilitates, we must turn to its sounds. In doing so, it is useful to recall Anne Middleton's argument about the "halting" (perhaps

31. Anne Middleton's "Acts of Vagrancy" is a foundational essay on this theme. See also Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, "Who Has Written This Book? Visionary Autobiography in Langland's C Text," in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium V*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), 101–16.

lolling?) structures of certain ornamented modes of Old English alliteration. In *Beowulf*, she sees alliteration working against the sense of the poem so that "the gradual accretion of ornament introduces a halting and spasmodic countermovement."[32] By contrast, the alliterative ornamentation in Ælfric of Eynsham's prose draws out and enhances the content or meaning of the words, so that sound and sense "flo[w] in a single smooth line."[33] In other words, to adapt Jonathan Swift's prescription, the sound is an echo to the sense. As a monk responsible for translating homiletic and didactic literature, Ælfric's task was to facilitate concrete spiritual understanding in his audience. Yet Langland was critical of established authority and its insistence on utilitarian uses of language that aimed to convey a concrete moral. Instead, like Rolle and Kempe, he embraced the affective and impressionistic capacity of language with what I call a poetics of lolling. The halts and countermovements Middleton identifies in *Beowulf* are akin to the lolling poetry of *Piers Plowman*, which works against smooth or linear alignments of sound and sense, creating a structure that facilitates recursive and associative thinking.

As we saw at moments in Richard Rolle's prose, alliteration is a formal device in which sound patterning can easily overtake sense, and so lends itself to Langland's poetics of lolling. Here I will turn to a particular moment when Langland's alliteration combines with other embellished soundplay to accentuate the aural texture of language in a way that foregrounds this playfully associative interaction between sound and sense. Langland's play with language is not an entirely new topic and has been discussed from varying perspectives. In her study of word games in *Piers Plowman* B, Mary Clemente Davlin argues that Langland's wordplay "is not an occasional or fortuitous device, but a characteristic way of writing and thinking, a clue to the way the poet saw the world."[34] At the risk of splitting hairs, I add that Langland's wordplay does not simply gesture toward how he *saw* the world, but also to how he *heard* the world and worked to understand its mysteries. My emphasis

32. Anne Middleton, "Ælfric's Answerable Style: The Rhetoric of Alliterative Prose," *Studies in Medieval Culture* 4, no. 1 (1973): 87.

33. Middleton, "Ælfric's Answerable Style," 88.

34. Mary Clemente Davlin, *A Game of Heuene: Word Play and the Meaning of Piers Plowman B* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1989), 10. For more on Langland's wordplay, see A. V. C. Schmidt, *The Clerkly Maker: Langland's Poetic Art* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987), which pits the noisy "jangling" of minstrels against Langland's more sophisticated poetics in a way that I believe neglects the overlap that Langland develops between noise and poetry. See also Schmidt's more recent essay "Lele Wordes and Bele Paroles: Some Aspects of Langland's Word-Play," in *Earthly Honest Things: Collected Essays on Piers Plowman* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 110–24.

here will be on punning rhetorical forms like *significatio* (one word with two meanings) and *traductio* or *adnominatio* (two or more words with similar sounds and different meanings). Attending to the ways that Langland plays with the aural and material aspects of language offers us an important way of thinking about his ethical and poetic project in *Piers Plowman*.

There are many moments in *Piers Plowman*—as well as formal and aural elements—that encourage an experience of Langland's poetry as noise, amplifying its significance. I turn now to another passage on *lollares* added to the C text, in which Langland describes "lewed ermytes" and their "lollarne lyf" (C. 9. 140). Such hermits:

> Loken louhliche to lache men almesse,
> In hope to sitte at euen by the hote coles,
> Vnlouke his legges abrood or ligge at his ese,
> Reste hym and roste hym and his rug turne,
> Drink druie and depe and drawe hym thenne to bedde,
> And whenne hym liketh and luste, his leue is to ryse
> And when he is rysen rometh out and right wel aspyeth
> Where he may rathest haue a repaest or a ronde of bacoun.
>
> (C. 9. 141–48)

This passage plays with homophonic verbs of concealing and revealing. Though the primary meaning of *loken* is "look" or "appear," from the Old English *locian*, the word's homophone from Old Icelandic *loka* meant "to lock," even "to conceal," a significance that stresses the *lollares*' duplicitous nature.[35] Juxtaposed with the assertion several lines later that the *lollare* "Vnlouke[s] his legges" in repose by the fire, these lines create a nimbus of wordplay around the notion of concealing and revealing, closure and disclosure in a way that resonates with the *lollares*' own duplicitous and seductive speech. This wordplay continues with *lacchen*, from the Old English *læccan*, "to seize or grasp," in the same line to denote the *lollares*' acts of unjustly taking alms.[36] Yet it also invokes the word's homophone, from the same Old English root, meaning "to latch, tie up, or secure," again reinforcing the *lollares*' secrecy and covert intentions.[37] In addition to these meanings, Langland may invoke another homophone, *lachen*, this one from the Old French

35. *MED*, s.v. "loken" v. 1 and v. 2, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary.

36. *MED*, s.v. "lacchen" v. 1, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary. Definition 5b of the verb, "to dart out, shoot out (the tongue)," is also potentially at play in Langland's characterization of *lollares*.

37. *MED*, s.v. "lacchen" v. 2, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary.

verb *laschier*, "to relax" or "go limp," which meant in Middle English "to be lax or slothful," also clearly applicable to the *lollares*.[38]

It is important to note that the wordplay of this passage is most apparent when the sound of the words is unhinged from their meaning. In other words, Langland is not punning strictly by invoking multiple plausible meanings at the same time. The meaning of "loken" is "appear," not "lock." His riotous invocations of homophones, however, serve as a way of tripping up readers and inviting rumination on meaning. This impulse toward deferral or delay is also evident in the sounds of this passage's opening lines with the declaration that *lollares "Lo*ken *lo*uhliche to *la*che men *al*messe" (C. 9. 141, emphasis added). The passage repeats l-o-l-o sounds, enacting a lolling movement of the tongue and lips, which is then extended and transmuted to the chiastic l-a-a-l sounds in *lache* and *almesse*. This play with language frustrates a straightforward path toward comprehension. In a moment of beautiful confusion, Langland's poetry intensifies a dynamic interplay between sound and sense, which slows the process of interpretation and proliferates meaning.

It is this moment, this intellectual space of confusion—and with it a playful yearning toward understanding—that Langland finds to be ethically and spiritually productive. Despite the depth of the *lollares*' associations with duplicity, it is significant that Truth, who never actually speaks in this passus, is the ultimate source of the ideas conveyed with such lolling language. Augustine can only describe the mystical experience he has shared with his mother Monica at Ostia with wordy rhetorical dilation.[39] Langland dramatizes Augustine's mystical theology of silence and refigures it into an English vernacular form: a personified Truth is silent, yet his perspective is best reported with language that lolls.

This impulse toward lolling language, and the yearning toward truth that accompanies it, is a fundamental element of Langland's vernacular theology, even in the B text, before Langland added his passages on *lollares*. The sixth vision (B. 18; C. 20), which depicts Christ's Passion, redemption, and harrowing of hell, is in many ways the poem's climax before the Pentecostal founding of the church and the apocalyptic coming of Antichrist in the final two passus. Though Stephen Barney identifies vision or "the activity of seeing" as a crucial theme of the sixth vision, I argue that hearing is at least as important.[40]

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38. *MED*, s.v. "lachen," https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary.

39. Augustine, *Confessions*, 2:50, dicussed in chapter 1.

40. Stephen Barney, *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman*, vol. 5 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 6.

This vision begins and ends with passages on music. As Will slips into his dream, loudly "rutt[ing]" (B. 18. 6), he hears a chorus of "gerlis" and "olde folke" alike, singing songs of praise (B. 18. 7–8). These aural details resonate with the vision's emphasis on the play of sounds in language, an undercurrent of the focal tension in the ensuing debate of the four daughters of God: Mercy, Truth, Righteousness, and Peace.[41] Davlin argues that this debate dramatizes how Mercy and Peace draw their sisters away from a rigid literalism with language toward a freer and more revelatory mode of language play—one for which, I add, sound plays a crucial role. After Mercy and Truth parlay, Peace enters "pleying" (B. 18. 167) to adapt her sister Righteousness's model of reciprocal justice into a new form. Righteousness scoffs at the idea of redemption, reminding Peace that God punished mankind for the sins of Adam and Eve. In response, Peace "in pacience y-clothed" (B. 18. 167) presses the notion of the *felix culpa* or "fortunate fall": the sins of the flesh are redeemed by the word made flesh, the incarnate Christ. In this view, while the body is a source of sin and error, it is also a locus of redemption. Peace transmutes the theology of the *felix culpa* into a theory of learning by opposites. To know well, she asserts, one must also know woe, "For no wighte woot what wele is þat neuere wo suffrede" (B. 18. 205). It is impossible to ignore the tongue-tying difficulty of this line. Its hyperalliteration sets four words beginning with the letter "w" in quick succession. The first three of these words—"wighte," "woot," and "what"—add consonance to this alliteration, repeating ending "t"-sounds so that echoing "w"s and "t"s are separated by different vowel sounds. This difficulty of pronunciation, and with it comprehension, momentarily enacts the "wo"—albeit playful—that will ultimately lead to "wele."

Peace puns similarly in an echo of this line near the end of her speech to Righteousness as she asserts: "Woot no wight what werre is þer þat pees regneþ, / Ne what is witterly wele til 'weylawey' hym teche" (B. 18. 227–28). Just as one cannot know peace without war, knowledge of "wele" comes when "[W]eylawey"—here functioning as a quasi-personification of the interjection "weylawey" (an inarticulate cry or wail)—teaches it. The punning soundplay of this moment is evident as "weylawey" provides a path

41. It has been well established, for example, that understanding the opening drama of this vision hangs on the aural similarities of "joust" and "just." As Faith explains the conflict to Will, "this Iesus of his gentries wole iuste in Piers armes" (B. 18. 22). The line also contains a homophonic pun on "gentrice," here primarily "gentleness" or "nobility" but also evoking *genitrice* and *genetricis*, the French and Latin words for "mother." The joust of Jesus against the devil is just. Such justice stems both from Jesus's gentleness and also from his mother, who imparted to Christ a body and human form.

or *way* toward *well*.[42] Such an aural game is not precisely the same as the hyperalliteration and consonance of Peace's earlier assertion. Yet both poetic modes play with the sounds of language in a way that privileges the physical experience of language as an element of interpretation.

The climactic moment of Langland's poetics of lolling in the B text occurs as Christ, preparing to harrow hell, addresses Lucifer. His speech amplifies the passus's emphasis on reciprocal justice as it stresses that salvation will come from beguiling the beguilers:

> Thow Lucifer, in liknesse of a luþer addere
> Gete bi gile þyng þat God loued;
> And I, in liknesse of a leode, þat lorde am of heuene,
> Graciousliche þi gile have quyt: go gile ayein gile!
> And as Adam and alle þoruȝ a tre shal turne to lyue,
> And gile is bigiled, and in his gile fallen:
> *Et cecidit in foveam quam fecit*.
>
> (B. 18. 355–61)

This formulation builds on Christ's appearance in the guise of a knight at the beginning of the passus: a dramatization of the idea that God's incarnation as Christ is a mode of theatrical performance. Moreover, the playful artifice of this action chimes in the language as repetition of "guile" and "beguile" combine with alliteration and assonantal play to produce a gabble of language. Beyond alliteration and word repetition, lolling soundplay is perhaps most evident—and significant—in the words denoting the main actors in this cosmological drama and the roles they take on: "*Lu*cyf*er*" adopts the guise of a "*lu*th*er*" or wicked adder while it is the guise of a "leo*de*" or man that the "lor*de*" of heaven assumes. In both formulations, actor and guise echo opening and closing aural elements. This interplay of sound and sense emphasizes the crafted guile of Langland's own poetry. It is here in the B text, and in passages like it, that Langland began formulating his poetics of lolling: the interrogation and commentary on poetry that he would develop and hone in the C text.

Such soundplay amplifies Langland's poetics of lolling by rendering poetic association and play into the very material of salvation, and so it would seem like a fitting place to end the poem. Yet instead, the poem continues. In the

42. Again, the C text clarifies this pun by amending "weylawey" to "wel-a-way." For more discussion, see Davlin, *A Game of Heuene*, 100.

seventh vision, immediately preceding the apocalyptic conclusion, Will sees a reenactment of the biblical scene of Pentecost, in which Piers the Plowman and his apostolic fellows are filled with the Holy Spirit, whom Conscience names Grace. In response to this vision, Conscience counsels Will to sing the Pentecostal song, *Veni creator spiritus*. This choice of hymn is not coincidental. Indeed, the biblical story of Pentecost from Acts 2:1–4 is an important and authoritative example of divine inspiration and understanding as aural experience. The twelve apostles first perceive the holy spirit as a sound ("And suddenly from heaven, there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind").[43] The noise of this mighty wind fills each of the apostles individually, enabling them to speak in tongues, understanding and uniting together through the sounds of language, despite not knowing the meaning of the words. For Langland, this scene of Christian fellowship is tinged with a note of failure and longing as this vision of the founding of the church leads to another, the eighth vision, in which Antichrist and his henchman, *Penetrans Domus*, lay siege to the Barn of Unity. Will, together with "manye hundred / . . . cride with Conscience, 'Help vs, God of grace!'" (B. 19. 212–13; C. 21. 211–12). The representation of Christian fellowship through immersive aural experience in the seventh vision anticipates Conscience's repeated cries for help as Antichrist destroys Unity in the eighth vision (B. 20. 76, 78, 140, 165, 201, 228; C. 22. 76, 78, 140, 165, 201, 228).

In the wake of the fall of Unity, Conscience's wails become a different form of aural inarticulacy as he vows to take up the life of a pilgrim. The poem closes with Conscience moving and being moved, audibly; wandering and crying out as he "gradde[s] after Grace" (B. 20. 387; C. 22. 386). Like Rolle's clamor and Kempe's sobbing and sighing, the voice of Conscience is inarticulate, signaling an orientation toward language and voice that relies on sound and extrasemantic significance to express a knowledge that is deeply felt. Such forms of felt knowledge and their relationship to the material circumstances of reading—including the oral and aural elements of language—were a focal concern in Wycliffite and anti-Wycliffite debates about reading, religious education, and the pursuit of spiritual truth. Indeed, Langland's poetics of lolling contributed to the aural and textual conditions that reanimated debates about the place of sound—and the material elements of language—in scriptural hermeneutics.

43. Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 162.

Wyclif, Lollards, and the *Vox Verborum*

At roughly the same time Langland completed the B text of *Piers Plowman*, or shortly thereafter, John Wyclif put the finishing touches on his treatise on scriptural interpretation, *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae* (On the truth of holy scripture).[44] With this work and many others, Wyclif became the figurehead for a movement of religious reformers intent on ousting what they saw as the decadence and corruption of the Catholic Church, a movement that came to be known widely as Lollardy.[45] Since the time of the early church Christian thinkers had worried about sound's capacity to overtake sense.[46] Wyclif and his followers revived the debate as they sought to reform church corruption by teaching that correct spirituality involved attention to rational essences rather than external physical signs.[47]

Wyclif's views on sound and meaning were part of a general philosophical tendency toward realist universalism. Broadly speaking, Wyclif held that to know a thing was to know its being or universal essence (a direct reflection of God) rather than the singular sensible qualities through which it

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44. Scholars continue to debate the exact dating of *Piers Plowman*, though a rough chronology can be established based on the poem's allusions to contemporary events. Typically, the A text is placed in the later 1360s, while B is between 1377 and 1381, and C is around 1388, though Ralph Hanna calls this chronology "at best, a gross statement." See Ralph Hanna, "The Versions and Revisions of *Piers Plowman*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Piers Plowman*, ed. Andrew Cole and Andrew Galloway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 38. It is not my intention to offer further or conclusive evidence on exact dating of *Piers Plowman* but with this general chronology in mind, I add Wyclif's *De Veritate* (ca. 1377–78) as another contemporaneous source for thinking through the chronology of the poem's revisions. For the date of *De Veritate*, see Ian Christopher Levy, introduction to John Wyclif, *On the Truth of Holy Scripture* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001), 2.

45. The question of when the word "lollard" came to refer to Wycliffites has undergone some revision in recent years. For many years, it was thought that the first instance of the word "lollard" occurred in reference to those followers of Wyclif condemned at the Blackfriar's Council of 1382. In his account of these events in the *FZ*, the Carmelite friar and theologian Thomas Netter records the suspension of one Henry Crumpe, another Cistercian, for disturbing the peace "quia vocavit haereticos Lollardos" (because he called the heretics Lollards). Yet Andrew Cole has recently shown that Netter's account in the *FZ* (dated sometime between 1393 and 1399) *retrospectively* applied the term "lollard" to those condemned at the Blackfriar's Council of 1382 and attributed the term's use to Crumpe. He uses this and other examples to advocate historiographical caution in locating an original use of the word in this sense. For Netter's account, see Walter Waddington Shirley, ed., *Fasciculi Zizaniorum Magistri Johannes Wyclif Cum Tritico* (London: Longman, 1858), 311–12. For Cole's discussion, see *Literature and Heresy*, 25–33 and all of chap. 2.

46. For a discussion of Wycliffite interpretive practices in relation to Augustinian hermeneutics, see Kantik Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and the Interpretation of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 10–11 and 23.

47. For a useful overview of Wyclif's philosophical realism, see Anne Hudson and Anthony Kenny, "Wyclif [Wycliffe], John [called Doctor Evangelicus] (d. 1384), theologian, philosopher, and religious reformer," *ODNB*, https://www.oxforddnb.com.

was perceptible to humankind. Wyclif acknowledged that comprehension of being was not formally separable from such sensible singulars; they are always known and apprehended together and are separable only in theory. Nevertheless, he reasoned that because of humankind's inordinate fondness for an object or being's concrete physical properties, the philosopher aiming to know it truly was apt to focus his attention more on those sensible singulars than on universal essence or *pura natura*. This was a dynamic he wished to correct, particularly in the context of scriptural hermeneutics.[48] Wyclif's realist universalism infused his ideas about reading and biblical interpretation. Grounded in Platonism, which advanced hierarchies between the soul or mind, an extension of God within man, and the fallen body and senses, Wyclif's views elevated scripture to the realm of pure idea rather than physical presence. As J. I. Catto writes, "[in scripture] above all was the face of God turned upon man."[49]

Thus, Wyclif advanced the notion of scriptural and spiritual truth as an insensible but nevertheless knowable interior core surrounded by accidental matter, perceptible through the senses, which the practice of exegesis should strive to eliminate at all costs. Wyclif's Neoplatonism in *De Veritate* was Augustinian in its emphasis on the representative nature of language, the distance of a sign or word from its referent, the thing itself. Indeed, Wyclif's reverence for Augustine is writ large over this work. "Look at this saint [Augustine]!" Wyclif writes, "He is such a humble logician, and still so subtle."[50] He uses Augustine's commentary on the Psalms, for example, to explain the proper way to explicate scripture: by using its own language and logic without placing oneself at the same level as its author. The correct way to interpret scripture, according to Wyclif, was to accept it in its totality rather than piecemeal, using its own logic to interpret the deeper and intended meaning of its figures.[51] We can only understand the New Testament's reference to Jesus as a lamb, for example, if we look at the killing of

48. For a fuller summary of Wyclif's universalism in *De Veritate*, see Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy*, 22–66. Penn R. Szyttya offers a useful discussion of Wyclif's universalism in the context of late medieval antifraternalism in *The Antifraternal Tradition in Medieval Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 152–82, especially 154–60. For a discussion of Wyclif's universalism in logical terms, see J. I. Catto, "Wyclif and Wycliffism at Oxford, 1356–1430," in *The History of the University of Oxford*, ed. J. I. Catto and T. A. R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 2:190–91.

49. Catto, "Wyclif and Wycliffism at Oxford," 196.

50. "Ecce iste sanctus, humilis logicus, sed subtilis." John Wyclif, *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae*, ed. Rudolf Buddensieg (London: Trubner, 1905–7), 1:12; Wyclif, *On the Truth of Holy Scripture*, 49.

51. Stephen E. Lahey offers a clear overview of Wyclif's ideas in *De Veritate* on interpreting according to the logic of scripture and situates these theories in relation to other theological treatments of scriptural interpretation. See Lahey, *John Wyclif* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 136–43.

the paschal lamb in the Old Testament, where we can begin to understand that this figure underscores his sacrifice for humankind.[52] Wyclif sought to eliminate all human impositions on the transcendent and eternal truth of God: those accidental and material facets of a text, including the sight of words on the page and the sound of the voice in oral performance.

In his efforts to set forth a program for the correct extraction of spiritual truth through scriptural interpretation, Wyclif warned against allowing the sounds of a word to overtake its meaning. Near the beginning of *De Veritate*, as he lays out how his ideas on interpretation relate to those of prior pagan and early Christian philosophers, he cites Gregory the Great's *Morals*: "For the sounds of the words of scripture are nothing unless as leaves making way for the fruit of sense. Therefore, if they obstruct, confuse, alienate, or in any way impede the sense, they are to be plucked out, fashioned (figured), or otherwise adjusted."[53] As in earlier theological texts, Wyclif's *vox* refers to the material form of the word, including its sounds, in isolation from its semantic meaning. The idea that the sounds of words are like leaves covering up the "fruit" of sense is consistent with Wyclif's later yearning for immediate and transparent understanding. Like Augustine, who desires to hear with the "ears of [his] heart," Wyclif longs for the immediate supralinguistic understanding of the holy elect, which takes place in silence. "It would be better," Wyclif claims "as it is openly known in [the case of] the blessed, to grasp the sentence without words, if [only] our inferiority did not hinder [us]."[54]

The sound of language was perilous specifically because it could lead to incorrect or incomplete understanding. Wyclif emphasized the dangerous superficiality of attending language's sounds rather than its meaning. Such superficial listening rendered meaningful language into noise. Using the views of Paul in 1 Corinthians, along with the gloss of Dionysius the Areopagite, Wyclif stresses that the scriptural interpreter should aim to discover divine intention:

> Therefore, in understanding sacred scripture, we ought to cast off the childish sense, and accept the sense that God teaches, like that [opinion]

52. For this example, see Wyclif, *On the Truth of Holy Scripture*, 74–75.

53. "Voces enim verborum scripture non sunt nisi ut folia ad fructum sensus proficiencia. Unde si odumbrant sensum, si confundunt, si distrahunt, vel quomodocunque impediunt, sunt extirpanda, figuranda, vel aliter aptanda." Wyclif, *De Veritate*, 1:21. In this reading, I am guided by Ghosh's translation of the passage, which renders "voces . . . verborum scripture" as "the sounds of the words of scripture." See Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy*, 24.

54. "Melius foret, ut patet in beatis, capere sentencian sine verbis, si nostra inferioritas non obesset." Wyclif, *De Veritate*, 1:21, 12–14; trans Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy*, 24.

> of the apostle in 1 Corinthians 13: when I was a child, I understood as a child, I spoke as a child, when I became a man, however, I left behind these, which were childish things.
>
> For this reason, the blessed Dionysius said [this] expressly in *On the Divine Names*, chapter four. "It is," he said, "irrational, in my estimation, and foolish, to attend not to the force of [God's] intention, but to the words (*diccionibus*), and [attending to the words rather than divine intention] is not the characteristic of those wishing to know divine things, but the characteristic of those taking up sounds alone (*sonos nudos*)."[55]

By juxtaposing the views of these two theologians, Wyclif equates superficial attention to the sound of language with undeveloped or childlike understanding of scripture. To attend to words or language is to focus on mere "sounds alone" while losing sight of divine will. The purpose of Wycliffite exegesis is therefore to clear away the obscuring sensory aspects of language, both aural and visual, to provide the raw truth of divine intent.

The evidence of Wyclif's lollard followers is somewhat more complex.[56] Somerset has demonstrated that contrary to long-held scholarly truisms, many lollard texts are deeply preoccupied with affecting and engaging the emotions and imaginations of their audiences.[57] Somerset's assessment of the importance of interior feelings or emotions in lollard writing is thoroughly convincing. Yet here I want to stress the ways that such lollard texts remain suspicious of exterior feelings or physical sensations in a manner

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55. "Debemus ergo intelligendo scripturam sacram sensum puerilem abicere ad sensum, quem deus docet, accipere iuxta illud apostoli prima Cor. tredecimo: quando eram ut parvulus, sapiebam ut parvulus, loquebar ut parvulus, quando autem factus sum vir, evacuavi ea, que errant parvuli. [I]deo signanter dicit beatus Dionisius in De Divinis Nominibus quarto cap. 'est,' inquit, 'irracionabile, ut estimo, et stultum, non virtuti intencionis attendere, sed diccionibus, et hoc non est divina intelligere volencium proprium, sed sonos nudos suscipiencium." Wyclif, *De Veritate*, 1:42–43. Ghosh discusses this passage in relation to Wyclif's attitudes contextualizing his discussion with Wyclif's general theories of scriptural exegesis in *The Wycliffite Heresy*, 43. My thanks to Joel D. Anderson for helping me with the thorny final bit of Latin in this passage.

56. For a range of perspectives on the internal variations of Wycliffism and the relationship between Wyclif's thought and that of his followers, see Fiona Somerset, Jill C. Havens, and Derrick G. Pitard, eds., *Lollards and Their Influence in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003). In considering questions around what or who counts as a lollard, I have found useful approaches like that of J. Patrick Hornbeck, who advocates understanding lollardy and Wycliffism with relational rather than essentialist models. Hornbeck argues that scholars of Wycliffite belief and practice should abandon the aim to codify lollardy into a set of core beliefs and instead focus on identifying "family resemblances" within heterodox communities. See J. Patrick Hornbeck, *What Is a Lollard? Dissent and Belief in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

57. See Somerset, *Feeling Like Saints*, especially parts 2 and 3.

similar to Langland's critiques of empty language and Wyclif's dismissal of the *vox verborum*. Rather than understanding such sensations as paths to emotion, lollard texts very often use the idea of noise to denounce the external signs, perceptible to the senses, that distract from true emotional understanding. Indeed, the vernacular writings of the Wycliffites are full of references to noise and to empty vocalization. One author even personifies such empty sound into a figure called "Gabbyng," who holds a debate with Reason, dramatizing the dearth of rational judgment or intention thought to accompany speech that amounts to sound alone.[58] For a particularly full treatment of sound and listening in relation to scriptural understanding, here I will turn to the writing of the accused Wycliffite William Thorpe, who recorded an autobiographical account of his interrogation by Archbishop Arundel around 1407.

Thorpe repeatedly invokes noise to refer to outward signs of devotion and to frame the religious experiences of those who worship incorrectly, paying too much attention to external physical experiences rather than cultivating correct inner understanding. When Arundel interrogates Thorpe on the Eucharistic teachings he has imparted to his congregation at Shrewsbury, Thorpe sidesteps Arundel's invitation to debate by telling a story about an event that took place when he gave a sermon there:

> And I seide, "Ser, I telle 3ou truli, I touchide no þing þere of þe sacrament of þe auter, no but in þis wise as I wol wiþ Goddis grace schewe here to 3ou. As I stood þere in þe pulpitte, bisiing me to teche þe heestis of God, *oon knyllide a sacring belle*, and herfor myche peple turned awei fersli and *with gret noyse* runnen frowardis me. And I, seynge þis seide to hem þus 'Goode men, 3ou were better to stoonden here stille and to here Goddis word! For certis, þe vertu and þe mede of þe moost holi sacrament of þe auter stondiþ myche moore in þe bileue þereof þat 3e owen to have in 3oure soulis þan it doiþ in þe outward si3t þerof. And þerfore 3ou were better to stonde stille quyetefulli and to heeren Goddis worde, siþ þoru3 heeringe þerof men comen to very bileue.' And oþer wise, ser, I am certeyne I spak not þere of þe worschipful sacrament of þe auter."[59]

By stressing that it is "þoru3 heeringe" that "men comen to very bileue," Thorpe evokes a variation on the Pauline instruction that faith comes from

58. Fiona Somerset, ed., *Four Wycliffite Dialogues* (Oxford: EETS, 2009), 43–53.

59. Anne Hudson, ed., *Two Wycliffite Texts* (Oxford: EETS, 1993), 52, emphasis added.

hearing. Yet he maintains suspicion of the wrong kind of hearing, noting that it is easiest to hear the voice of God "quyetefulli." Like Langland's Sloth, Thorpe's mislistening congregation fails to recognize spiritually meaningful sounds, and this failure results in noisy aural outbursts.[60] Thorpe laments that his parishioners would prefer to turn their attention to more pleasurable "outward siȝt[s]," even when, in this case, such signs are heard rather than seen. He goes further to suggest that such attention to sounds rather than sense is irrational or "animal-like," as Elizabeth Schirmer suggests.[61] In keeping with their bestial natures, the parishioners do not speak, but instead make a "gret noyse." Later in his *Testimony*, Thorpe's denunciation of false pilgrims "wiþ noyse of her syngynge, and wiþ þe soun of her pipinge, and wiþ þe gingelynge of her Cantirbirie bellis, and wiþ þe berkynge out of dogges aftir hem" echoes his earlier suggestion that attention to outward signs rather than spiritual essences results in a parishioner that both listens to and makes noise.[62]

The dynamic of noise emerging from misdirected attention or irrational listening appears at a number of moments in the literature of late medieval England, perhaps most notably in John Gower's visionary depiction of the Peasant's Revolt of 1381, which was probably written around the same time as the C text of *Piers Plowman*. Here a jay who is "well-versed in rhetoric" flies to a treetop and speaks to a crowd of beasts who "lent misguided ears to doubtful words."[63] The resulting hubbub of animalistic bleating, barking, and roaring has been much discussed, largely as a conservative strategy on Gower's part to marginalize the voices of the peasants by depicting them as incommunicative and irrational.[64] Without discounting this point of view, I add that this scene is much more pointedly about the manipulative oration of Wat Tyler (here widely understood to be represented by the jay) and its effect on the unreasoning and "bestial" peasants, who are deaf to the content of Tyler's speech. They are instead taken in by its seductive sounds,

60. The noteworthy difference in these accounts lies in the attitude each author takes toward bells. While for Langland, they have spiritual and social meaning, for Thorpe they are distractions from spiritual meaning.

61. Elizabeth Schirmer, "William Thorpe's Narrative Theology," *SAC* 31 (2009): 275.

62. Hudson, *Two Wycliffite Texts*, 64.

63. "Graculus vnus erat edoctus in arte loquendi. . . . Arboris in summum conscendit, et oris aperti / Voce suis paribus talia verba refert" (ll. 681, 691–92); "Vocibus ambiguis deceptam prebuilt aurem / Vulgus" (ll. 703–4), Gower, *Poems on Contemporary Events*, 74–77.

64. See, for example, Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 205–8. Justice discusses noise as a trope or rhetorical strategy for silencing peasant voices not only in Gower's account, but also among other chroniclers of the Peasant's Revolt.

amplifying his noise—a voice that stresses sound without substance—throughout the landscape with their animalistic brays.

In a telling echo of this episode in Gower's *Vox*, the author of the Wycliffite *Tretise of Miraclis Pleying* uses a remarkably similar avian analogy to dismiss the empty theatricality of certain corrupt preachers.[65] Miracle playing, the author claims, is a kind of "waytynge vanite[e]," an idle entertainment akin to the "shrew[ing]" of a priest at mass, who "shrewyn hemsilf al day, as a iay þat al day crieþ 'Watte shrewe!' shrewynge hymself."[66] The author's insistent repetition of the verb *shreuen* combines with his Gowerian bird analogy to suggest that such preaching is nothing more than animal noise. Stemming from the Old English word *screawa*, or shrewmouse, the noun *shreue*, from which *shreuen* derives, was used in Middle English to denote a rogue, a devil, or in the usage that persisted most forcefully into the early modern period and beyond, an overbearing woman.[67] The verb was most often associated with dangerous and vain speech acts like cursing. By comparing such "shrewing" to the mindless noise of a jay, the Wycliffite author draws attention to the lack of spiritual substance behind these performances. Like the oration of Gower's jaybird rhetorician or the knelling of Thorpe's "sacrynge belle," such preaching is simply sound without spiritual meaning.

Gower was an ostensibly orthodox author writing the *Vox* decades before Thorpe's heretical *Testimony* and the Wycliffite *Tretise of Miraclis Pleying*. Yet, despite their varying purposes and contexts, these texts all attest to the generality of concern about how sound could overtake sense in Langland's own time and in the decades that followed. It is important to remember that Wyclif himself did not invent the idea that sounds had the potential to obscure sense. As I have shown, it was an idea that had been in circulation

65. The identification of the *Tretise* as a Wycliffite text has been the subject of some debate in recent years. Lawrence Clopper draws on earlier scholarship by Ruth Nissé, which explores the nuances of the *Tretise*'s account of "pleying" to argue that the text cannot be lollard. More recently, Fiona Somerset uses the *Tretise*'s nuanced treatment of "pley" to show how lollard writings scripted the feelings of their readers and auditors. See Ruth Nissé, "Reversing Discipline: The *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, Lollard Exegesis, and the Failure of Representation," *YLS* 11 (1997): 163–94; Lawrence Clopper, "Is the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* a Lollard Tract against Devotional Drama?," *Viator* 34 (2003): 229–71; and Somerset, *Feeling Like Saints*, 147–52.

66. Clifford Davidson, ed., *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993), 100.

67. *MED*, s.v. "shreue" n. and "shreuen" v., https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary. Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* is perhaps the best-known example of the widespread purchase of this term.

in various orthodox theological forms since before Augustine. As Wyclif's ideas gained traction in late medieval England, accusations of noisemaking issued from all sides of the debate. Antilollard polemic accentuates the loud, noisy, and unsignified qualities of the lollard style of argumentation, underscoring its mysterious and inscrutable effect on audiences. In so doing, such polemic stresses the Wycliffite's perceived capacity for dangerous persuasion through pleasing sounds rather than meaning. While he admits that they are "eloquentes," the late fourteenth-century chronicler and Augustinian canon Henry Knighton also calls Wycliffites "over-cryers" or "super-cryers" (superclamantes), emphasizing the penetrating and overweening volume of their voices.[68] He stresses that in their style of argument, they "do not influence with right reason," but speak "with a clamorous and confused voice."[69]

Vernacular writing, too, makes use of the trope of Wycliffite noise. The early fifteenth-century lament "Defend us all from lollardry" associates lollard noise with misinformed reading and interpretation when it stresses that lollards render the bible "myswent": perverted or twisted. In their misguided exegesis, they "iangle of Iob or Ieremye" and "bable þe bible day and niȝt."[70] Such insistent dismissals of Wycliffite preaching and argumentation call attention to the extremism of lollard hermeneutic practice, a radical program empowering lay readers that was deeply threatening to the clerical authorities in control of scriptural interpretation, and ultimately to the institutional church as a whole. This impulse to empower lay readers and speakers is also evident in texts whose Wycliffite affinities remain debated, but who nevertheless share with the Wycliffites a fundamental desire for social and religious reform. To conclude, I turn to the early fifteenth-century alliterative poem *Mum and the Sothsegger* in order to gesture to how Langland's embrace of poetic noise—and the resonance he develops between such sounds and lay voices—makes its way into later poetry of social critique.

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68. For more on Knighton's background and dates, see G. H. Martin, "Knighton, Henry, (d. c. 1396), chronicler and Augustinian canon," *ODNB*, https://www.oxforddnb.com.

69. "Nam sicut magister eorum Wyclif potens erat et validus in disputationibus . . . sic isti [Wyclif discipuli] licet recenter ad sectam illam attracti nimis efficiebantur eloquentes . . ., in litigiosis deceptationibus omnes superclamantes. Et sic quod non poterant recta ratione quasi pugnanti impetuositate cum voca clamosa et turbida et altisonis verbis supplebant." Henry Knighton, *Chronicon Henrici Knighton vel Cnitthon, Monachi Lycestrensis*, ed. J. R. Lumby (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1889–95), 2:187.

70. See Rossell Hope Robbins, ed., *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 152–57.

Noise and Public Poetry in the *Piers Plowman* Tradition

Because of its shared alliterative form and overlapping social concerns, *Mum and the Sothsegger* is often considered part of the *Piers Plowman* tradition: a collection of texts from the mid-fourteenth through the beginning of the fifteenth centuries (and arguably into the present day), all of which are broadly concerned with reforming ecclesiastical and secular government. Like Langland, the *Mum*-poet is invested in the importance of a form of lay literacy grounded in the experience and expression of language as noise and, perhaps even more explicitly than Langland, understands such an orientation toward language to be an important means of social critique.

In its broadest sense, *Mum and the Sothsegger* is a meditation on the role of poetic reproof in a just society: what Anne Middleton has called "the idea of public poetry."[71] As in *Piers Plowman*, a narrator undertakes a quest to understand the nature and relative virtue of two modes of verbal relation: keeping mum and soothsaying in the face of tyranny and corruption. Both of these orientations to language are at times treated abstractly and at times personified into characters who interact and debate with one another. Unlike many other medieval debate poems, *Mum and the Sothsegger* sides firmly with truth-telling or soothsaying over silence. Mum is persistently associated with flattery and yea-saying, while the Sothsegger speaks up in an instructive or corrective way. Like *Piers Plowman*, the poem is suspicious of empty or idle talk and its capacity to hide self-interested intention. But it also frames reproof as "babble," using an echoic noise word to assert the importance of lay voices speaking truth to power.

In a passage that recalls Langland's description of *lunatic lollares*, the *Mum*-poet emphasizes the Sothsegger's precarious position in relation to those in power:

> "Saunder the serviselees" shuld be his name,
> For he abideth in no houshold half a yere to th'ende
> But the lord and the lady been loeth of his words,
> And the meyny and he mowe not accorde,
> But al to-teereth his toppe for his trewe tales.
> He can not speke in terms ne in tyme nother,
> But bablith fourth bustusely as barn un-ylerid;

71. Anne Middleton, "The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II," *Speculum* 53, no. 1 (1978): 94–114. See also Matthew Giancarlo, "*Piers Plowman*, Parliament, and the Public Voice," *YLS* 17 (2003): 136–74.

But ever he hitteth on the heed of the nayle-is ende,
That the pure poynte pricketh on the sothe
Til the foule flesh vomy for attre.

(44–53)[72]

The Sothsegger, who is reviled by lord and lady for his blunt assertions, speaks without "terms"—in the sense of "specialized vocabulary" or "jargon" as well as "temporal limit"—and also without "tyme." Though Soothsayer-Saunder is not quite a lunatic, he emphatically lacks the wit and learning of those with clerical authority. His effusive critique, the poet tells us, is like the boisterous babble of an unlearned child. In almost all contexts, the Middle English verb *babelen* refers fairly simply to empty language or inarticulate sound. The *MED* lists "to stammer, mumble, mutter" (as when Langland's Dreamer "babbles on his beads" at the beginning of the second vision) and "to chatter" or "prattle." Yet here and elsewhere in the poem, the *Mum*-poet uses *babelen* to refer to a more substantive form of speech. Far from being empty, the Soothsayer's babble is critical and instructive.

I would suggest that, like Langland, the *Mum*-poet uses this word to emphasize not simply the rough or loud qualities of the Soothsayer's voice, but also his embodied lay understanding and expression of *soth* or truth. The insistently physical nature of the Sothsegger's expression is evident not only in the echoic verb *babelen*, but also in the assertion that he babbles "bustusely." Here the word refers primarily to the rude and unlearned qualities of the Sothsegger's voice. Yet its suggested provenance from the Old French word *boisteous*—"limping, rough, noisy"—recalls the "stuttering" (balbuciens) of Richard Rolle and chimes with the "lame," "lazy," or "lolling" pronunciation we have seen in Langland's description of *lollares*. These resonances emphasize the material nature of the Sothsegger's speech. Thus, both Langland and the *Mum*-poet work to revalue perspectives like that of Julian of Norwich, whose distinction between correctly voiced prayer and that which is said "boistrosly with mouth, failing devowte entending" condemns a misalignment of attention and voice.[73]

The *Mum*-poet's other uses of *babelen* are also instructive. The *MED* lists *Mum and the Sothsegger* as the only examples of *babelen* as a verb for the warbling or twitter of birds, as when the narrator observes in the landscape of

72. James M. Dean, ed., *Richard the Redeless and Mum and the Sothsegger* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000). All further quotations from *Mum* will be cited parenthetically by line number in the text.

73. Julian of Norwich, *Shewings*, 136.

his dream "in every bussh was a brid that in his beste wise / Bablid with his bile, that blisse was to hire."[74] Though we cannot know for sure from this entry that these are the only examples of *babelen* used in this sense, it does suggest that it may have been somewhat idiosyncratic to the *Mum*-poet. It is tempting to read this correlation of babble with both truth-telling and birdsong as the *Mum*-poet's efforts to flip the script of characterizations like Gower's, which frame Wat Tyler's critique of secular government as the screeching of a jay. At the very least, this constellation of associations—babble, soothsaying, avian song—correlates the Sothsegger's voice with that of birds, underscoring its embodied nature and expression of animalistic ways of knowing.

Indeed, the *Mum*-poet elsewhere suggests that certain animal sounds offer a kind of egalitarian ideal of communication. In the narrator's dream vision, a beekeeper explains his well-ordered bee society as a model for human government and statecraft. Part of the bees' success, the beekeeper tells us, is in their noisemaking, which is widely accessible to bees of all stations. He explains:

> The bomelyng of the bees, as Bartholomew us telleth,
> Thair noyse and thaire notz at eve and eeke at morowe,
> Lyve (believe) hit wel, thair lydene the leste of thaym hit knoweth.
>
> (1028–30)

In their assertion that even the "leste"—the smallest or lowest of the bees—can understand the language shared by all, these lines offer a striking example of public poetry's emphasis on common language, that is, language that is both ordinary and held in common. As Middleton notes, public poetry often emphasizes such language as "on the whole the best medium for keeping moral knowledge active and heartfelt."[75] Here the *Mum*-poet reverses learned theories of *vox*, which held animal sounds as irrational or confused utterance. Instead, the *Mum*-poet asserts the importance of animal sounds as a model of language that eliminates social hierarchies, contributing to a just and ordered society.

Like this apian "bomelyng," the Sothsegger's babble is an imperfect and material form of expression—one that, as Middleton suggests, offers the fullest way to give voice to common experience.[76] The effect of the Sothsegger's

74. *MED*, s.v. "babelen" v. 1, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary.
75. Middleton, "Idea of Public Poetry," 99.
76. Middleton, "Idea of Public Poetry," 99.

rough babble is a richer and more perfect articulation of truth as he "hitteth on the heed of the nayle-is ende, / That the pure poynte pricketh on the sothe" (51–52). Here the *Mum*-poet evokes the language of craft—a hammer hitting a nail and a "poynte"—which we may take as the sharp end of a knife, needle, pen, or stylus, and more—that "prick[s]." These lines may also be taken in terms of the medical analogy that emerges later in the poem as the poet stresses how the "sores of the royaulme" may be lanced with speech, so that "burste oute alle the boicches (boils) and blaynes (blisters) of the hert" (1120–22) and concludes that he has heard that such sores "hellen wel the rather / Whan th'anger and th'attre is al oute yrenne" (1125–26). Indeed, just as the voice that emerges from the Sothsegger is insistently embodied, it also affects listeners likewise in a physical way. The "poynte" of the Sothsegger's babble lances the truth "Til the foule flesh vomy for attre" (53). Both passages figure soothsaying as a forceful ejection of "attre" or poison. If, as Middleton suggests, the public poetry of the *Piers Plowman* tradition asks "what *in the world* shall we do and say?" it also asks *how* we should do and say.[77] Both Langland and the *Mum*-poet conceive of ethical speech as social critique through a language of experience, a language that emphasizes its place in time and in the body and affects its listeners on a visceral and material level. For Langland, the ideas and sounds associated with lolling and *lollares* proved to be fruitful in his articulation of this verbal ethics. In his early dream vision of the Houses of Fame and Rumor, Chaucer, too, located the importance of experience—and the knowledge it produced—in forms of "idle" talk conceived of and named in terms of noise.

77. Middleton, "Idea of Public Poetry," 109.

Chapter 4

"Litel Sercles" of Sound

Resonance and the Noise of Language in Chaucer's House of Fame

> Sllt. The nethermost deck of the first machine jogged forward its flyboard with sllt the first batch of quire-folded papers. Sllt. Almost human the way it sllt to call attention. Doing its level best to speak. That door too sllt creaking, asking to be shut. Everything speaks in its own way. Sllt.
>
> —James Joyce, *Ulysses*, "Aeolus" (100)

As the eagle and visionary guide of Chaucer's *House of Fame* explains, the Dreamer's journey to Fame's house is a reward for years of diligent service to the god of Love. It is also a correction for his turgid poetry, which remains uninformed by any amorous experience. Chaucer's semi-self-deprecating characterization engages the key problem of authorship and authority that has driven study of the poem over the past few decades. The idea of experience has been important to readings of *The House of Fame* as early as Sheila Delaney's influential study, which located the poem in a larger intellectual context particular to late medieval philosophy: a preoccupation with knowing the ineffable and a growing "awareness of the coexistence of contradictory truths."[1] In Delaney's reading, Chaucer-the-Dreamer must navigate toward truth according to a principle of what she calls "skeptical fideism." Ultimately, he encounters it in the "pluralism" of his own experience rather than the authority of literary and Latinate authors. Since this study, scholarship on *The House of Fame* has continued to emphasize the poem's critique of textual authority in favor of experience.[2] It has

1. Sheila Delany, *Chaucer's House of Fame: The Poetics of Skeptical Fideism* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), 1.

2. See, for example, J. M. Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Martin Irvine, "Medieval Grammatical Theory and Chaucer's House of Fame,"

also begun to explore where and how Chaucer locates an alternate model of literary authority, often stressing the importance of vernacular language and voices.[3]

The concept of vernacularity is etymologically linked to the indigenous and the domestic through its root Latin word *verna*, meaning "home-born slave." This provenance underscores the subordinate position of the vernacular expression in relation to the authority of Latin. Indeed, scholars like Leslie Kordecki have shown how the idea of the vernacular underwrites hierarchical dichotomies beyond Latin vs. English in *The House of Fame*. These include (among others) aural vs. written, lay vs. clerical, animal vs. human, and feminine vs. masculine. All of these contrasting poles will come into play in this chapter, where I will also add inarticulate vs. articulate and sound vs. sense as a crucial means of approaching the idea of vernacularity in the Middle Ages. For Chaucer, knowledge is most keenly felt from listening to inarticulate voices, which he associates with the laity and the vernacular language they speak. As the previous chapters have shown, the experience of language for its sounds and feelings was a crucial feature of the bodily epistemologies developing among important figures of lay piety and vernacular religious writing at the turn of the fifteenth century. The following two chapters will show how Chaucer translates this dynamic into a secular milieu. Sound is an important medium of experiential lay knowledge first (as this chapter will show) for the Dreamer in *The House of Fame*, and then (in the next chapter) for the Wife of Bath.

To make this shift toward examining the relationships among sound, sense, and the body in secular conceptions of knowledge, I turn to recent work in the history of music. Veit Erlmann's excavation of the importance of "resonance," with its links to association and sympathy, has been an important influence on my thinking on noise.[4] This book's archive suggests how the concept of resonance—or something quite close to it, *avant la lettre*—was at play in late medieval England, before the eighteenth-century resonance

Speculum 60, no. 4 (1985): 850–76, and his later book-length study *Making of Textual Culture*; Robert M. Jordan, *Chaucer's Poetics and the Modern Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); A. J. Minnis, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Katherine Zieman, "Chaucer's Voys," *Representations* 60 (1997): 70–91.

3. Many of these studies have stressed the importance of an interplay of orality and vernacularity to this Chaucerian mode of authority. See, for example, Lesley Kordecki, *Ecofeminist Subjectivities: Chaucer's Talking Birds* (New York: Palgrave, 2011), 25–51; Leslie Arnovick, "'In Forme of Speche' Is Anxiety: Orality in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," *Oral Tradition* 11 (1996): 320–45. See also Ebbe Klitgård, "Chaucer's Narrative Voice in the *House of Fame*," *CR* 32, no. 3 (1998): 260–66.

4. Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance*.

theories of hearing to which Erlmann draws our attention. Indeed, Chaucer's *House of Fame* makes a case similar to Erlmann's take on sound: that it offers a form of immediate and sympathetic knowledge that works in tandem with the rational knowledge of the intellect. Chaucer's key term for such felt knowledge is "experience," and he emphatically stresses its lay nature. Sound—and the knowledge it brings—is not entirely divorced from reason and intellectual understanding, as Erlmann's account makes clear. Chaucer, too, calls attention to the cooperation and interplay of experience—a bodily understanding that resists articulation—and intellectual intelligence, effectively locating vernacular poetic authority not in opposition to but within experience.

The poem's movement toward experiential vernacular knowledge is also a movement toward noise. The key term *tydynge* is crucial in this regard. It is the term the poem uses throughout the Dreamer's vision to denote the ultimate source of the experiential knowledge that he lacks. As a general word for "news," "report," or other mode of oral communication, the word *tydinge* reminds us that the Middle English noun *noise* and its related verb *noisen* could refer to news transmitted by rumor and oral report.[5] The Middle English noun *tydynges* is cognate with the noun *tide*, meaning "time," "season," or "tidal currents," and also to the verb *tiden*: "to happen" or "come about." With these close etymological relationships *tydynges* were intimately connected to the fluidity of chance occurrence.[6] Chaucer upholds this link in *The House of Fame*, first by naming "Aventure" (1980), a term denoting fate, fame, and fortune or chance, to be the mother of "tydings." He does so further by drawing from Boethian writing on the deity Fortuna, who Chaucer informs us is Fame's sister (1547–48), in his description of the goddess Fame. Rebecca Davis has highlighted how the ideas of flux and movement are crucial thematic and aesthetic concerns in *The House of Fame*, noting, "Like the fluid tides that are their semantic cousins, 'tydynges' derive their potency from their motion, their instability, and their ability to canvass large distances effortlessly."[7] Like Davis, I am interested in the fluid movement of information and of meaning in the poem and in the ways that Chaucer evokes this flux through the poem's form. But I will approach the issue from the perspective of sound, showing how Chaucer's use of the term *tydynges* draws on long-standing associations between chance and noise (as distinct from music and from meaningful language). The solution to the Dreamer's

5. *MED*, s.v. "noise" and "noisen," https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary.
6. *MED*, s.v. "tīding(e)," https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary.
7. Rebecca Davis, "Fugitive Poetics in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," *SAC* 37 (2015): 116.

problem of missing experience is not simply to listen but to immerse himself in a world of noise: a hubbub of lay voices associated with the physicality, excess, and accident embedded in what medieval grammarians would call the *vox confusa*.

Like the discipline of music, medieval grammar stressed the dangerous potential of the voice to become noise by reveling in its extrasemantic elements of sound, texture, and feeling. To guard against this possibility, grammarians created taxonomies of the voice based in its capacity to carry meaning and located ultimate literary authority in forms that held the greatest degree of rational control over the raw aural material of *vox*. Martin Irvine and other scholars have shown how Chaucer played with and parodied these sources in *The House of Fame*.[8] Yet the degree of the medieval grammatical preoccupation with the physical over the conceptual aspects of *vox* has not yet been acknowledged. Nor have scholars given sufficient attention to the importance of aural epistemologies drawn from medieval grammar in the poem. The Dreamer's journey into the increasingly noisy and confused realms of Fame and Rumor articulate the importance of what I will call the resonant "noise" of language: its capacity to convey feeling, sensation, and the knowledge of experience, as well as semantically precise information.

Over the course of his dream journey, the Dreamer moves through spaces increasingly resounding with forms of *vox* that are unstructured by reason and that incite feeling—both physical and emotional—over mental experience. These are the inarticulate sounds of women, of animals, and ultimately, of inanimate objects, all forms of *vox* that grammarians would deem of a lower order. It is ultimately in the House of Rumor, the place of *fama* in its manifestation of gossip rather than glory, where the poem locates the experiential lay knowledge, grounded in the *vox confusa* and the noise of language, that the Dreamer has been missing. Here the poem not only shows readers the physicality of the Dreamer's experience of language, but also enacts that experience of language in the poem's readers (and listeners). It amplifies the corporeality of language so that sounds and sensations overcome sense, drawing readers into a recursive rhythmic structure that Chaucer might call "little circles" of sound, enforcing a mode of reading that is as much bodily as it is conceptual. For Chaucer, this form of aesthetic or sensory engagement, which resists articulation, is a crucial and authoritative component in the pursuit of knowledge.

8. See Zieman, "Chaucer's Voys" and work by Martin Irvine.

Seeing, Hearing, and the Problem of Experience in *The House of Fame*

At the opening of his dream, Chaucer's Dreamer finds himself in a temple "ymad of glas" (120): a space that places him squarely in the sensory realm of vision. His description of the space suggests its luminosity as well as its stillness and monumentality as he names the heavy and durable materials used for its construction and its objects: the gold of the statues, "stondynge in sondry stages" (122), and the "table of bras" (142), on which the Dreamer finds written Virgil's epic poem, the *Aeneid*. As the Dreamer moves through the glass temple of Venus—full of "images" (121) and "portreytures" (131)—over the course of book 1, he punctuates his narrative with variations on the expression "I saw," no fewer than seventeen times.

Chaucer's most important sources in this book are Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's account of the House of Fame in *Metamorphoses* 12. The temple of glass is thus a space tied to the literate authority of the Latin textual tradition and the visual reading it requires. Chaucer's repurposing of these sources underscores their transition from oral to written textual objects, and arguably mutes the aurality of both authors. Ovid's account of the House of Fame describes its material as "resounding brass" (aere sonante), which makes "the entire [structure] roar and carry back voices and double back all that it hears."[9] Chaucer translates this medium into a table on which the entire *Aeneid* is inscribed that lies mounted "on a wall" (141) in the temple. Thus, Chaucer's brass table is an object of static visual interest, demanding to be looked at and read from a distance.

Yet Chaucer's Virgilian resonances gesture toward an interest and investment in sound—and in lay listening—that will develop over the course of the poem, most fully as the Dreamer enters the House of Rumor near the poem's end. Chaucer's English translation of Virgil's lines "I wol now synge, yif I kan / The armes and also the man" (143–44) playfully animates and extends the trace of aurality in these lines with a bilingual homophonic pun. By adding the phrase, "if I kan," Chaucer self-deprecatingly acknowledges his poetic debt to Virgil. The word *kan*—from the Old English *cunnan*—was undergoing a semantic shift during this period from meaning "to know" or "to know how" to the use we recognize today: "to be able." The interplay of intellectual and experiential knowledge that is a central concern of the poem is embedded in the word's broader semantic range, which encompassed both

9. "Tota fremit vocesque refert iteratque quod audit." Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. T. E. Page, trans. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 2:182–84. Translations are mine, but I am guided by those of Miller.

concrete understanding and knowing by doing at this moment in time. Further, as scholars have pointed out, Chaucer's "kan" echoes Virgil's "cano."[10] By using an English word of Germanic origin that imitates the sound of the Latin word "sing" (cano), Chaucer places the English language on a par with Latin and traces a link between the English language and aurality. Verbs for "singing" (canere) and "knowing" (cunnan) are linked in homophonic association, drawing the meaning of "kan" more emphatically toward the aural and the experiential.

Chaucer's playful allusion to Virgilian song is not the sole reference to aurality in book 1. Despite reading the narrative of the *Aeneid* in front of him, the Dreamer also begins to *hear* moments of it as well in what Christopher Baswell calls a curious moment of "sympathetic perception."[11] Narrating an episode from book 2, when Aeneas's dead wife Creusa appears to him, the Dreamer relates that "it was pitee for to here" (189). It is significant that the Dreamer acknowledges a link between hearing and pity only through indirect discourse. At this early point in the narrative, though he hears the voice of Creusa and is moved to pity, he still maintains a narrative distance, not yet fully able to translate such pity to his own readers. Nevertheless, this moment is an early example of the importance of hearing, significantly occurring when a feminine voice incites heightened sympathy in the Dreamer, a mode of empathic listening that culminates in book 1 with the figure of Dido.

In the *Aeneid*, Virgil's most frequent epithets for Dido are *misserime* (most pitiable) and *furens* (raging, raving). By the time Chaucer was composing his dream vision, Dido had acquired a long and complex literary history, one that highlights her associations with the luxurious sensuality and illicitly directed emotion of certain modes of reading.[12] The religious associations between Dido and the dangerous enticements of the body were present throughout the Middle Ages. In his survey of Virgil's reception in England over the course of the Middle Ages, Baswell outlines an allegorical strand of reading that interpreted the *Aeneid* in terms of spiritual progress and the ages of man. According to this model, book 4 was figured in terms of Aeneas's "voluptuous adolescence": his discovery of sexuality before

10. For a discussion of this moment as a possible pun, see Joseph A. Dane, "Yif I 'Arma Virumque' Kan: Note on Chaucer's *House of Fame* Line 143," *American Notes and Queries* 19 (1981): 134.

11. Christopher Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England: Figuring the Aeneid from the Twelfth Century to Chaucer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 233.

12. For more on this history, see Marilynn Desmond, *Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality, and the Medieval "Aeneid"* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). See also Thomas Hahn, "Don't Cry for Me Augustinus: Dido and the Dangers of Empathy," in *Truth and Tales: Cultural Mobility and Medieval Media*, ed. Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2015), 42–59.

reaching rational maturity.[13] By Chaucer's time, Dido's link with passionate and perilous seduction was deeply entrenched. Yet some evidence suggests that it was tempered with a certain lay skepticism for the position of clerical authority that advanced this point of view. In his allegorical account of the Banquet of Conscience, for example, Langland's Doctor of Divinity (who is ultimately proven to be a corrupt authority) uses "dido" as a word for "false fable"—here strikingly associated with games of chance—when he dismisses the remarks of Patience as "but a dido . . . a dysour's tale (i.e., 'dicer's tale')" (B. 13. 172). Langland's usage may be a reference to Virgil's Dido, or it may be a reduplicative nonsense word, or both at the same time.[14] By placing this dismissal in the mouth of a spiritual fraud, Langland's clever usage may suggest that by Chaucer's time, vernacular poets like Langland were beginning to question the long-standing authoritative tradition that rejected Dido and her voice as insignificant.

Chaucer, too, is skeptical. His summary of the *Aeneid* slows significantly to linger on the story of Dido. Moving away from the indirect discourse he applies to the lament of Creusa, the Dreamer follows Ovid's account of Dido in the *Heroides*, giving direct voice to Dido's "grete peyne" (312). Thomas Hahn has argued that this section of *The House of Fame* is one of several places in Chaucer's poetic corpus in which he departs from Virgilian and Augustinian precedents, turning to the voice of Dido to articulate a vernacular poetics that engages the feelings of his readers.[15] Indeed, Chaucer shows an esteem for Dido's voice and for the feelings it both expresses and incites. Hers is the only voice from the *Aeneid* that Chaucer ventriloquizes directly, a point he acknowledges explicitly with the assertion "Non other auctour alegge I" (314). In Chaucer's hands, Virgil's Dido—raging and raving—has become an author: a voice of literary authority. This passage begins to shift poetic authority away from the established authoritative voices of the Latin literary tradition and toward those associated with lay experience.

Dido's lament emerges immediately after a lengthy aside by the Dreamer, who bewails the treachery of men and more broadly their susceptibility to false appearances. The pairing of these "twin arias"—in Baswell's apt phrasing—intensifies the Dreamer's affective response reading of Dido's plight, as well as his emotional and vocal tie to the Carthaginian queen.[16]

13. Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England*, 10.

14. Traugott Lawler, *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman*, vol. 4 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 52–53.

15. Hahn, "Don't Cry for Me Augustinus," 47–51.

16. Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England*, 234.

As Baswell notes, at the moment of Dido's lament, the narrative of her encounter with Aeneas disappears, secondary instead to her voice alone and the pathos it conveys. There are no details of Aeneas's arrival, his hunt with Dido, or their consummation in the cave, or of Dido's explicit death by her own hand. Dido's voice thus subordinates narrative content to experience, adding a moment of poetic lyricism that stalls the Dreamer's retelling of the Virgilian narrative of empire. Baswell reads this as the Dreamer's surrender to "tawdry sentiment," a formulation that unwittingly reinforces readings of Dido's passionate affect—and its effect on readers—as a force of stagnation and dangerous distraction from heroic action.[17]

In contrast, I read this moment in the narrative as one of productive suspension, much like Langland's lepers "lolling" in the lap of Abraham. It is an episode that prefigures the experiential world the Dreamer will encounter in the House of Rumor, even as it stalls his movement forward. In this, it is both anticipatory and recursive, articulating a circular formation that comes to be conveyed with the sound and shape of Dido's language. The Dreamer recounts her lament, beginning:

> "Allas," quod she, "my swete herte,
> Have pitee on my sorwes smerte,
> And slee mee not! Goo nought awey!
> O woful Dido, wel-away!"
> Quod she to herselve thoo.
> "O Eneas what wol ye doo?
> O that your love, ne your bond
> That ye have sworn with your ryght hond,
> Ne my crewel deth," quod she,
> "May holde yow stille here with me!
> O haveth of my deth pitee!
> . . . . . .
> O, have ye men such godlyhede
> In speche and never a del of trouthe?"
>
> (315–30)

As Dido continues, she cries "O wel-awey that I was born!" (345), "O wikke Fame!" (349), and "O, soth ys, evey thing ys wyst" (351). The proliferation of "O"s in this oration diverges from the rational articulate utterance elevated

17. Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England*, 236.

as a standard of literate authority, working instead to signify the raw emotion of their speaker.

Moreover, they convey this experience to readers, enacting in the body the circular formation evoked in the moment's narrative suspension. Circles are an important corporeal and linguistic figure in *The House of Fame*, one that Chaucer adopts and expands from a similar Boethian formulation. In the *Consolatio*, long acknowledged as an important source for Chaucer's early dream vision, Boethius's Lady Philosophy uses the figure of the circle (*orbem*) to describe the course of correct thought, which she instructs Boethius to bend inward toward his soul and away from the darkness of the body.[18] Yet while Boethius's use of the circle figure aims ultimately to move away from the flesh and the physical world, Chaucer's evocation embraces such corporeality. On the page and in the mouth, the shape of Dido's interjected "O"s anticipates the eagle's discussion of the vocal sounds that ascend to Fame's House, in a process he likens to "litel roundell[s] as a sercle" (791), which proliferate "ever moo" (801) until they reach their destination at the House of Fame. They also approximate the House of Rumor's "thousand holes, and wel moo / To leten wel the soun out goo" (1949–50) as the Dreamer nears the end of his journey.[19]

These gestures to aurality amidst an overall emphasis on vision and seeing in book 1 anticipate the purpose of the Dreamer's vision, articulated in a crucial scene at the opening of book 2. As he converses with the eagle who will serve as his visionary guide, the Dreamer learns that for years he has labored "To make bookys songes, dytees, / In ryme or elles in cadence" (622–23) in the service of Venus, the goddess of Love. Yet, according to the eagle, the Dreamer has been "peyn[ing]" himself with such service, "Although [he] haddest never part" (627–28). This lack of experience makes its way into the Dreamer's poetic voice. After spending the entire day on accounting or "rekenynges" (653), the Dreamer returns home where, "In stede of reste and newe thynges" (654), he sits "domb as any stoon, / . . . at another book" (656–57). The eagle's solution to this dazed poetic muteness is to connect the Dreamer to "tydinges / Of Loves folk" (644–45) that, he explains, are immanent, all around the Dreamer:

> And noght oonly fro fer contree
> That ther no tydyng cometh to thee,

18. Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. S. J. Tester (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 296. For further discussion of Chaucer's use of Boethian circles, see Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England*, 244–45.

19. Davis discusses this formal and physical dynamic in relation to a later passage in *The House of Fame* in "Fugitive Poetics in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," 127–29.

But of thy verray neyghebores
That duellen almost at thy dores,
Thou herist neither that ne this.
(647–51, emphasis added)

In this passage, the poem stresses the somatic and poetic benefit of a model of knowledge acquisition tied to gossip and "tydynges," both words that imply the expression of lay forms of knowledge. Listening to such buzz (for, as we will see, gossip is in close lexical connection with noise in *The House of Fame*) will heal his dazedness, and in turn his poetic muteness. This emphasis on hearing anticipates and justifies the Dreamer's experience and increasing immersion in the senses as he journeys through the confused hubbub of sounds and voices ringing through the Houses of Fame and Rumor. Such expressions of lay knowledge are tied explicitly to what medieval grammarians would call the *vox confusa*, a term whose hierarchical associations Chaucer would draw from and subvert in his depiction of the Houses of Fame and Rumor.

Literate Authority and the Discipline of *Vox*

Exegetes and theologians from Augustine in the fourth century to Wyclif and his followers in the fourteenth debated the correct relationship between sounds and sense. Here I venture more deeply into the related medieval disciplines of grammar and music in order to show how lay knowledge was tied to modes of listening and to inarticulate expression that emphasized sound over sense. From the perspective of learned authorities, such lay perception and utterance improperly pushed *vox*—the sounds that were understood to bear meaning—into the realm of meaningless noise.

At its most fundamental level, medieval grammar was akin to music in its concern with the raw material of *vox*—a term alternately translated as "sound" and "voice." *Vox* was distinct from *sonus* in its capacity to carry meaning. Grammarians subscribed to the common dictum that that all *vox* was *sonus* but not all *sonus* was *vox*; in doing so, they struggled to delineate boundaries between sound that was meaningful and that which was not.[20] In his overview of medieval grammar and its effect on Western literate culture, Martin Irvine highlights the importance of the mental and conceptual

20. Bartholomaeus Anglicus offers one example in his section *De musica*. Trevisa's translation reads: "And eueriche vois is soun, and nou3t a3einward." See Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things*, 2:1387.

aspects of language for the discipline of grammar, asserting that "the subsemantic or merely physical attributes of speech sounds were not a concern for grammarians."[21] It is true that meaning was of utmost importance to grammarians as they sought to distinguish between signifying and nonsignifying sound. But in the process of doing so, grammarians have quite a lot to say about the physical properties of *vox*. Over the course of several centuries, they created taxonomies that gauged how much meaning resided in each mode of *vox* and from where it came. They also codified methods—including grammar, pronunciation, and writing—to contain the voice in its sounded materiality. The mode of *vox* with the utmost meaning and authority was that which demonstrated mastery in all three areas.

As they worked to classify *vox*, medieval thinkers took care to distinguish between its conceptual and its physical aspects. The sixth-century grammarian Priscian begins his *Institutiones grammaticae* with the following definition: "Philosophers define *vox* to be 'very thin struck air' or 'its property perceptible to hearing,' that is, what properly strikes the ears. And the first part of the definition is taken from the substance; the second part from the concept, which the Greeks call *ennoia*, that is, from the accidents. The hearing of *vox* is an accident inasmuch as it depends on the sound itself."[22] To Priscian, *vox* has two aspects: one wholly material and tied to "substance," the other mental and tied to "concept." This distinction between material and cognitive aspects of language would prove remarkably persistent. Priscian's logic of the production and cognition of speech placed mental experience (*affectus mentis*) as a point of origin, followed by articulate spoken utterance (*articulata vox coartata*), struck air (*aer ictus*), struck air's perceptible property (*sensibile aurium*), conception (*ennoia*), and finally, mental meaning (*sensus mentis*).[23] Irvine shows how commentaries on Priscian from the twelfth century onward link this logic to a similar Boethian formulation, which placed things (*res*) as a point of origin, followed by concepts (*intellectus*), spoken utterance (*vox*), and then letters (*littera*).[24] These articulations of human

21. Irvine, "Medieval Grammatical Theory," 856.

22. "Philosophi definiunt, vocem esse aerem tenuissimum ictum vel suum sensibile aurium, id est quod proprie auribus accidit. Et est prior definitio a substantia sumpta, altera vero a notione, quam Graeci [*ennoian*] dicunt, hoc est ab accidentibus. [A]ccidit enim voci auditus, quantum in ipsa est." Heinrich Keil, ed., *Grammatici Latini ex Recensione Henrici Keilii* (Lipsiae: B. G. Teubneri, 1857), 2:5. Translations of Priscian are mine, though I am guided by those of Copeland and Sluiter in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 172–89.

23. Irvine discusses this logic in the context of the relationship between signifier and signified as a central concern in medieval grammar in "Medieval Grammatical Theory," 856.

24. Irvine, "Medieval Grammatical Theory," 856.

understanding draw attention to how medieval thinkers privileged the conceptual aspects of language and perceived the physical experience of voice to be secondary to mental understanding.

This ultimate emphasis on mental cognition led grammarians to formulate various means to control and contain the physical aspects of the voice. Focusing on rules of pronunciation and meter, the grammatical doctrine of *lectio* elucidated the practice of oral interpretive reading, containing the physicality of language by arranging its pronunciation.[25] In accordance with its etymology, which referred to the correct alignment of pieces or joints, the process of articulation was a way of choreographing the body so that the physical aspects of language would not overtake or interfere with meaning. Isidore of Seville enumerates faults that must be avoided in oratory:

> The pure and worthy speech of an orator should be without all faults, as much in letters as in words, and indeed in expressions. In letters, their adjoining should be apt and proper, and thus care must be taken to ensure that the final vowel of the preceding word is not the same as the initial vowel of the following word, as *feminae Aegyptiae* ("of an Egyptian woman"). This construction would be better if consonants were adjoined to the vowels. One should also avoid the adjoining of the three consonants which coming together seem to clash (*stridere*) and brawl (*rixare*), that is *r*, *s*, and *x*, as: *ars studiorum* ("the art of study"), *rex Xerxes* ("King Xerxes") or *error Romuli* (the wandering of Romulus). Also to be avoided is the consonant *m* dashing (*inlisa*) against vowels, as *verum enim* ("but indeed").[26]

Undesirable formations of language "clash," "brawl," and "dash": verbs that stress the violence and unchecked physicality of such language. By contrast, Isidore's ideal of correct articulation foregrounds the physical control of the

25. For a detailed discussion of the practice of *lectio* and its place in medieval education, see Irvine, *Making of Textual Culture*, 68–74.

26. "Praeterea purum et honestum oratoris eloquium carere debet omnibus vitiis tam in litteris, quam in verbis, quam etiam in sententiis. In literis, ut iunctura apta et conveniens sit; et sic observandum, ne praecedentis verbi extrema vocalis in eandem vocalem primam incidat verbi sequentis, ut 'feminae Aegyptiae.' Quae structura melior fit, si consonants vocalibus adplicantur. Trium quoque consonantium, quae in se incidentes stridere et quasi rixare videntur, vitanda iunctura est, id est, R, S, X, ut: 'ars studiorum,' 'rex Xerxes,' error Romuli.' Fugienda est et consonans M inlisa vocalibus, ut 'verum enim.'" Isidore of Seville, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum*, ed. W. A. Lindsay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), 2.19. For a translation, see Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. and trans. Stephen A. Barney et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 75. Translation is from this edition with my own tweaks.

speaker by promoting an even alternation between vowel and consonant sounds: this was the "pure and worthy" speech of Isidore's ideal orator.

This controlled alternation of sounds in Isidore's ideal of *lectio* found its counterpart in medieval music theory, where the lack of proper rational control opened sound up to immoderate excess. In his treatise *De institutione musica*, the late antique philosopher Boethius promotes a standard of music similar to Isidore's ideal.[27] Boethius follows Plato in advocating music that is "moderate," "simple," and "masculine" over other more extreme forms, which he deems to be "effeminate," "wild," and "varied."[28] This gendered distinction recalls Rolle's assertion that to ascend to the highest contemplation by spurning the allurements of the flesh is done "viriliter," that is, "in a manly way." It is significant that Boethius repeatedly returns to "modesta" as a descriptor for his ideal musical mode. Stemming from the term "modus" or "measured amount," *modesta* underscores the numeracy and arithmetical reasoning that was understood to stave off excess.

To illustrate the dangers of such immoderate and excessive music, Boethius recounts the myth of Timotheus of Mileteus, a Greek composer exiled from Sparta for adding one or more (accounts vary) extra strings to the lyre.[29] According to Boethius, the sounds of Timotheus's strings were more "multiple" (multipl[ex]), a term that chimes with Boethius's own previous dismissal of sounds that are wild, varied, and effeminate.[30] The aural excess of Timotheus's newfangled lyre begins to identify such music with chance: the more strings there are on the lyre, the more tones are possible,

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27. Chaucer cites Boethius explicitly at *House of Fame*, ll. 972–78, and scholars have noted echoes of Boethian ideas from both his *Consolatio* and *De institutione musica* (in the eagle's lesson on sound). See Minnis, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer*, 203–8.

28. "[Musica] ita ut sit modesta ac simplex, et mascula, nec effeminata, nec fera, nec varia." Boethius, *De institutione musica*, 181. For the English, see Boethius, *Fundamentals of Music*, 4.

29. Timotheus had a complex reputation among ancient thinkers whose accounts of his art and his transgression at Sparta emphasize his general tendency toward excess both in personal vanity and in professional mercenary gain. Boethius's account draws from these associations and adds his own gloss. He offers what he claims to be the Spartan text in Greek, which outlines the musician's crime and punishment. According to this document, Timotheus's innovation "defiled the hearing of the youth through *polycordia* and the novelty of the melodies and used *poikilia* instead of simple and orderly music." For the Greek text and a discussion of its textual transmission and problems, see Boethius, *Fundamentals of Music*, 4–5 and 185–88. For a historical overview of these accounts, see Martha Maas, "Timotheus at Sparta: The Nature of the Crime," in *Musical Humanism and Its Legacy: Essays in Honor of Claude V. Palisca*, ed. Nancy Kovaleff Baker and Barbara Russano Hanning (Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press, 1992), 37–52. While he received support from some authors like Euripides, Timotheus was widely maligned by others. Plutarch accuses him of improper self-praise, and Pherecrates called him *pyrrias* (redhead), an epithet conveying his reputation as a "'foxy' rascal." See Maas, "Timotheus at Sparta," 39–40.

30. Boethius, *De institutione musica*, 184.

and the more subject to chance are the tunes that emerge—a contrast with the ordered and predictable music of the traditional lyre.

As disciplines, then, both music and grammar were concerned with regulating sound, whether in song or in oratory, so that it was not simply noisy sound alone, but instead produced the precise mental meaning associated with *vox*. To grammarians, this oratory or *lectio* was only the first step in literate authority. Ultimately oral reading was subordinate in its association with elementary education.[31] As the grammarian progressed through his education, the written word became the ultimate sign of literary authority. In Isidore's influential formulation, cited by many other grammarians, letters (*littera*) take their name because they provide a route or path (*iter*) for the one reading.[32] The fourth-century Roman grammarian Donatus first classified sound into the classes of *articulata* and *confusa*, explaining, "Articulate sound can be captured in letters, confused sound cannot be written."[33] By suggesting that the *vox confusa* resisted "capture" with writing, Donatus was among the first to suggest that writing was a means of containing the unruly raw material of *vox*.

In the sixth century, Priscian expanded on Donatus's taxonomy by dividing sounds along the axes of signification and scriptability: *articulata*, *inarticulata*, *literata*, and *illiterata*. At the pinnacle of this hierarchy of meaning was the *vox articulata literata*: the voice that is bound by the rules of grammar and able to be captured in writing. Priscian—and many grammarians after him—named Virgil as an example of this voice, citing the first line of the *Aeneid*: "Arma virumque cano." This example is noteworthy for the way it evokes the presence of *vox* as a primarily aural material with the verb *canere*, "to sing." The tension between writing and aurality here calls attention to the way that Virgil's "song," restrained with Latin grammar and prosody as well as with letters, carries ultimate meaning and authority.

Even as he held up the Latinate *vox articulata literata* as a pinnacle of literary authority, Priscian was also keen to explore the degrees of rationality that lay along the other axes he outlined. Sounds like "the hissing and wails of men" were examples of the *vox articulata illiterata*. Though they did not reach the level of Virgil and other Latin authorities because they resisted being contained in letters, Priscian reasoned that such sounds nevertheless

31. For more on this dynamic, see Copeland, "Why Women Can't Read."

32. Isidore, *Etymologies*, 39. For the Latin, see *Etymologiarum*, 43.

33. "Articulata est quae litteris conprehendi potest, confusa quae scribi non potest." *GL*, 4:367. For the English, see Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 87.

carried some meaning.[34] A human cry or wail—in pain or in rapture, for example—carried the overall "sense" of that feeling or experience along with it, even though it emerged involuntarily rather than by virtue of the will. Donatus offers a useful antecedent to Priscian's discussion of the *vox articulata illiterata* in his grammatical treatment of the interjection:

> The interjection is a part of speech thrown in between the other parts of speech to express the affects of the soul (*animi adfectus*); either of someone who fears, like *ei*; or of someone who wishes, like *o*; or of someone in pain, like *heu*; or of someone merry, like *evax*. . . . There can be no certain accents in the interjections—this also goes for other words that are of crude (*inconditas*) sound-form.[35]

To Donatus, such sounds express the emotions or "affects of the soul" and so convey meaning in some way. Yet his discussion of the interjection here begins the third book of his *Ars Maior*, the so-called *Barbarismus*. As this placement suggests, these interjections were barbarisms, and thus out of line with literate authority. Donatus confirms this judgment by designating such sounds as "crude." As Ineke Sluiter explains, the form of the interjection was not always articulate, and it behaved irregularly. By addressing such an irregular expression in a grammatical text, Donatus renders this very irregularity into a rule.[36]

While human howls and wails were beneath the *vox articulata literata* on Priscian's hierarchy of meaning, other forms of the *vox confusa* were lower still. Sounds like the "coax" of a frog and "cra" of a raven (illustrations taken from the Greek dramatist Aristophanes) were examples of the *vox inarticulata literata*. They could be written down, as Aristophanes had done centuries ago, by inventing onomatopoetic representations of their sounds. But such

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34. "Vocis autem differentiae sunt quattor: articulata, inarticulata, literata, illiterata. Articulata est, quae coartata, hoc est copulata cum aliquo sensu mentis eius, qui loquitur, profertur. Inarticulata est contraria, quae a nullo affectu proficiscitur mentis. Literata est, quae scribi potest, illiterata, quae scribi non potest. Inveniuntur igitur quaedam voces articulatae, quae possunt scribi et intellegi, ut: 'Arma virumque cano,' quaedam, quae non possunt scribi, intelleguntur tamen, ut sibili hominum et gemitus: hae enim voces, quamvis sensum aliquem significent proferentis eas, scribi tamen non possunt." *GL*, 2:5.

35. "Interiecto est pars orationis interiecta aliis partibus orationis ad exprimendos animi adfectus; aut metuentis, ut ei [eu]; aut optantis, ut o; aut dolentis, ut [heia et] heu; aut laetantis, ut evax. . . . Accentus in interiectionibus certi esse non possunt, ut fere in aliis vocibus quas inconditas invenimus." *GL*, 4:391–92. For the English, see Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 93.

36. Ineke Sluiter, *Ancient Grammar in Context: Contributions to the Study of Ancient Linguistic Thought* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1990), especially chap. 4. See also Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 93 n. 57.

words were nonsense and carried no meaning. At the lowest end of Priscian's hierarchy were sounds like rattling (*crepitus*) and roaring or lowing (*mugitus*). While there were words to represent these sounds, the sounds themselves could not be understood to be meaningful. Thus, they illustrated the *vox inarticulata illiterata*: a voice that was incomprehensible and unwritable, and so simply noise or sound alone.[37]

Just as the interjection codified the middling sounds of human expressions of emotion, the onomatopoeia did so for sound of the lowest order, the *vox confusa*. Isidore writes: "Onomatopoeia is a word fashioned to imitate the sound of a confused voice (*sonum vocis confusae*) as the *stridor* ('creaking') of hinges, the *hinnitus* ('whinnying') of horses, the *mugitus* ('lowing') of cows, the *balatus* ('bleating') of sheep."[38] By offering animal sounds and the noise of inanimate objects as examples of the *vox confusa*, Priscian and Isidore participate in what linguists like Mel Chen might call an "animacy hierarchy": a taxonomy that measures the relative worth of an object or being based upon its degree of liveliness or sentience.[39] The litmus of such liveliness for early grammarians was the degree of reason apparent in the sounds emitted by each being or object.

The discipline of music too made similarly hierarchical distinctions among sounds and sound-makers. As we have seen, by elevating "musica modesta"—"modest" or "modulated" music—as an invaluable tool for shaping moderation and masculine virtue, Boethius makes a distinction between rational mathematical musical judgment and engagement that is physical or affective. This distinction becomes progressively clearer and more pronounced over the course of his first book of *De institutione musica* and culminates as Boethius outlines what it means to be a true musician. As he begins his discussion he distinguishes between the *knowledge* of music and its *practice*:

> Now, it must be considered that every art and discipline holds reason to be more honorable and more natural than craft, which is practiced with the hand and work of the artisan. Indeed, it is much greater and

37. "Aliae autem sunt, quae quamvis scribantur, tamen inarticulatae dicuntur, cum nihil significent, ut 'coax,' 'cra.' Aliae vero sunt inarticulatae et illiteratae, quae nec scribi possunt ne intellegi, ut crepitus, mugitus et similia." *GL*, 2:5–6

38. "Onomatopoeia est nomen adfictum ad imitandum sonum vocis confusae, ut 'stridor valvarum,' 'hinnitus equorum,' 'mugitus boum [sic],' 'balatus ovium.' Isidore, *Etymologiarum*, 1.37.14. For the English, see Isidore, *Etymologies*, 62. Translation altered to highlight Isidore's use of the key term *vox confusa*.

39. Chen, *Animacies*, 13–14, 23–30.

> more powerful to know what someone fashions, than to perform that very thing that someone knows. In fact, bodily craft, as if slaving, acts as an attendant, [while] truly, reason rules as a mistress. Unless the hand effects that which reason sanctions, it acts in vain. How much more illustrious is the knowledge of music in the examination of reason than in the work and act of performance! As much, in fact, as the mind is superior to the body; for without reason, one passes time in servitude. Reason truly reigns and leads the way to rectitude. For unless its rule is obeyed, work without the foundation of reason will totter.[40]

For Boethius, reason adds governance, structure, and understanding to the physical experience or practice of music. A true musician does not simply perform music, but also—or instead—understands its numerical structure intellectually. Those who know music only through habit or the physical labor of the body are in servitude while those with knowledge "weighed by reason" (ratione perpensa) have attained "sovereignty" (imperio).[41] Recalling the root of the word vernacular in *verna* or "household slave," Boethius's insistence on the servile position of certain music-makers begins to suggest a hierarchy that distinguishes true musicians from lay performers.

Indeed, Boethius's division between intellectual and experiential knowledge of music leads him to divide those engaged with the art of music into three classes: those who play or perform on instruments, those who shape or compose songs, and those who judge the work and the song of the instruments.[42] It is the final class—those who judge truth from falsehood—whom Boethius names as true musicians. Those mere performers, whose labor and "enslavement" he has already discussed at some length, belong to the first class. The second class, the class of poets, does not fit

40. "Nunc illud est intuendum, quod omnis ars omnisque etiam disciplina honorabiliorem naturaliter habeat rationem quam artificium, quod manu atque opere exercetur artificis. Multo enim est maius atque auctius scire, quod quisque faciat, quam ipsum illud efficere, quod sciat; etenim artificium corporale quasi serviens famulatur, ratio vero quasi domina imperat. Et nisi manus secundum id, quod ratio sancit, efficiat, frustra sit. Quanto igitur praeclarior est scientia musicae in cognitione rationis quam in opere efficiendi atque actu! Tan tum scilicet, quantum corpus mente superatur; quod scilicet rationis expers servitio degit. Illa vero imperat atque ad rectum deducit. Quod nisi eius pareatur imperio, ex pers opus rationis titubabit." Boethius, *De institutione musica*, 223–24.

41. "Vero est musicus, qui ratione perpensa canendi scientiam non servitio operis sed imperio speculationis adsumpsit." Boethius, *De institutione musica*, 224. This distinction proved remarkably persistent among music theorists over the course of the Middle Ages. For further discussion, see Leach, *Sung Birds*, 44–48.

42. "Tria igitur genera sunt, quae circa artem musicam versantur. Unum genus est, quod intrumentis agitur, aliud fingit carmina, tertium, quod instrumentorum opus carmenque diiudicat." Boethius, *De institutione musica*, 225.

so neatly into either camp. It is clear that Boethius wishes to distinguish them vigorously from true musicians. He explains: "The second genus of those practicing music is [that] of the poets, who are turned to song not as much by speculation and reason as by a certain natural instinct. And for this reason, this genus too must be separated from music."[43] In grammatical terms, the sounds of the poets are perhaps closest to the *vox articulata illiterata*: they convey some sense, but it is instinctual rather than through reasoned intention.[44]

In *The House of Fame*, Chaucer adopts the hierarchies of *vox* outlined by grammarians in reverse, sending the Dreamer from reading the voices of literate authorities in scholarly isolation, into the domain of Fame and Rumor in search of tidings. Over the course of his dream, Chaucer's Dreamer moves through spaces that resound with the sounds of what grammarians would consider voices of a "lower order"—those of women, animals, and things—in an experience calculated to shift his attention and attunement more emphatically to the noise of language.

Aqualine Authority and Chaucer's Poetic Windbag

After Dido in book 1, the poem's next unlikely authority is the eagle. The eagle's lecture begins by invoking the same theories of sense perception and cognition we have seen in early grammatical texts. He recalls the grammatical commonplace that all *vox* is *sonus* when he asserts:

> Thou wost wel this, that spech is soun,
> Or elles no man myghte hyt here;
> Now herke what y wol the lere.
>
> (762–64)

The eagle's rhyme on *here*/*lere*—"hearing" and both "learning" and "teaching"—recalls the resonance between Virgil's *cano* and Chaucer's own "kan." Both instances of wordplay reinforce the mutual dependence of hearing and

43. "Secundum vero musicam agentium genus poetarum est, quod non potius speculatione ac ratione, quam naturali quodam instinctu fertur ad carmen. Atque idcirco hoc quoque genus a musica segregandum est." Boethius, *De institutione musica*, 225.

44. This notion of the poet as "shaper" of *vox* was important to grammarians and other medieval literary theorists as well. Susan Schibanoff has highlighted a principle of "hylomorphic poetics" in medieval conceptions of authorship, which held that the poet "fathered" the poem into being by giving shape to passive and formless linguistic matter. See Susan Schibanoff, *Chaucer's Queer Poetics: Rereading the Dream Trio* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 14–23.

knowing, accentuating the Dreamer's movement away from silent reading toward the lay practice of listening.

Yet curiously, this authoritative lesson comes from a bird, one of the primary examples of the inarticulate *vox* among grammarians. Indeed, though he speaks "in mannes vois" (556), it is clear that the eagle's voice is not linked to traditional authority. When he calls to the Dreamer "Awak!" it is with "the same vois and stevene / That useth oon [the Dreamer] koude nevene" (560–62). This uncannily familiar voice is suggestive of someone who is tasked with habitually waking the Dreamer: a servant, for example, or a wife.[45] Indeed, the sound of the eagle's voice reinforces this point. As they approach the House of Fame at the end of book 2, the eagle hails the Dreamer with a shrill cry, to which the Dreamer remarks "That never herde I thing so hye" (1020). With the voice of the eagle, then, the poem cultivates associations among the voices of birds, women, and servants. Even if the eagle's voice belongs to a "man," a term that in Middle English could refer more broadly to a human being, it is not a man fully endowed with the authority of masculinity. Even if the eagle uses human language, it is not with the authority of standard models of Latinate literacy.

Moreover, the eagle's voice is explicitly tied to the *vox confusa*. Irvine notes that animal sounds are among those aligned with these nonauthoritative forms of *vox* in the grammatical tradition. As we have seen, Priscian cites the "cra" of the raven as an example of the *vox inarticulata literata*: an irrational utterance without mental sense. In a late eleventh-century gloss of Priscian, the grammarian Papias lists a catalog of bird sounds, beginning with the eagle: "the sounds (*voces*) of mute animals thus proclaiming express that eagles screech (*clangere*), hawks chirp (*pipilare*), vultures cry (*pulpulare*)."[46] In its broadest sense *clangere*, the verb used to denote eagles' utterance, meant "to make noise" and often applied to the sounds of eagles and other birds.[47] As Irvine reminds us, Papias's writings were well known in later centuries, including the fourteenth, as Chaucer composed *The House of Fame*. Irvine thus reads the eagle's voice as a "grammatical joke," a parodic allusion to writings like Papias's gloss that humorously exposes the eagle's absence

45. See *Riverside Chaucer*, 982, n. 561–62.

46. Quoted in Irvine, "Medieval Grammatical Theory," 860.

47. The term also frequently referred to the sounds of horns, a detail suggesting that the voice of Chaucer's eagle may anticipate the sounds piped from the trumpets of "sklaunder" and "clere laud" in Fame's house. The English word "clang" did not enter the language until the sixteenth century, well after Chaucer. But the *OED*'s first attested use of the word is a reference to "the clanging trump of swift report" in the English clergyman Abraham Fleming's 1576 work *A panoplie of epistles*. See *OED*, s.v. "clang" v. 1, https://www.oed.com.

of learning and, with it, authority.[48] Other scholars have similarly read the eagle as a humorous parody of authority: a windbag whose argument is a *reductio ad absurdum*, and whose speech may amount to an extended gag on flatulence, thus enacting the very "broken air" he describes.[49] The eagle does indeed seem full of himself. As they approach the House of Fame toward the end of book 2, he prepares to let the Dreamer go, explaining how the latter should make use of his aquiline exposition of sound. Insisting on the straightforward nature of his speech, the eagle addresses the Dreamer:

> Telle me this now feythfully,
> Have y not preved thus symply,
> Withoute any subtilte
> Of speche, or gret prolixite
> Of termes of philosophie,
> Of figures of poetrie,
> Or colours of rethorike?
> Pardee, hit oughte the to lyke,
> For hard langage and hard matere
> Ys encombrous for to here.
>
> (853–62)

The eagle congratulates himself on explaining the abstract workings of fame to the Dreamer in straightforward language and asserts that the rhetorical ornamentation of philosophy, poetry, and rhetoric is a means of hiding meaning, rendering language "hard" or intractable and ultimately impenetrable to understanding. In sum, the eagle's lengthy speech amounts to the simple question: "haven't I proven this to you simply?" The Dreamer's laconic reply—"Yis" (864)—emphasizes the eagle's claim to authority over the Dreamer. It also amplifies a bird-brained tendency to speak at length, as if he loved the simple sound of his own voice: a bag of hot air, indeed.

These gestures tie the eagle's voice increasingly to the noise of the *vox confusa*. Yet it is here—in the apparently empty physicality of language—that Chaucer locates a new mode of vernacular poetic authority. The eagle continues to boast:

> "A ha!" quod he, "lo so I can
> Lewedly to a lewed man

48. Irvine, "Medieval Grammatical Theory," 860.

49. See John Leyerle, "Chaucer's Windy Eagle," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 40 (1971): 247–65. On the absurd aspects of the eagle's argument, see Minnis, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer*, 204.

Speke, and shewe hym swyche skiles
That he may shake hem be the biles,
So palpable they shulden be."
(865–69)

Here his introductory interjection of "A ha!" is an expression of the *vox articulata illiterata*, recalling the "O"s of Dido emanating from the brass tablet in the temple of glass. Moreover, the line begins to hint that this noise is the locus of poetic invention. The passage begins with a curious separation by no less than a full line between the auxiliary "can" and its load-bearing partner verb "speke" as the eagle asserts "lo so I can / . . . / Speke." The result is to stress aurally the phrase "I can" so that "speak" seems tacked on as an afterthought. In this way, the line again evokes song by way of the Virgilian *cano*, and so resonates with Chaucer's translation of the opening line of the *Aeneid* written on the table of brass, "I wol now synge, yif I kan." Despite the renunciations of poetic rhetoric within his claims to straightforwardness, the eagle is a poet in his own right. With the image of an anthropomorphic "skile" with a "bile" or beak that the Dreamer can grab hold of and shake around, he invents a personified figuration that renders the abstract concept of "skil" (defined in Middle English as "the intellectual faculty" or "reason") as a bird with a bill.[50] At this moment, in G. L. Kittredge's memorable formulation, the eagle "drops unexpectedly into the bird idiom," an assessment that suggests we may read this line as a Chaucerian experimentation with one mode of writing in the *vox confusa*.[51] The humor in this characterization is impossible to overlook. Yet it serves an earnest purpose. The organ of avian utterance—the bill—is linked to reasoning faculties. By presenting the eagle, a blowhard whose speech approaches nonsense, as a crucial guide in the Dreamer's quest for "tydynges," the Dreamer's encounter with the eagle suggests that immersion in the noise of the *vox confusa* will be key to the experience necessary for the Dreamer's education.

Experience and the Noise of Language

The eagle's physics lesson on sound indicates how an extrasemantic experience of language is a key locus for this lay knowledge. The eagle promises the House of Fame will be a space resounding with the *vox confusa*.

50. *MED*, s.v. "skil," https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary.
51. See *Riverside Chaucer*, 984, n. 868.

He describes the mechanism of vocal amplification or "multiplicacioun" that takes place in Fame's house:

> Now hennesforth y wol the teche
> How every speche, or noyse, or soun,
> Thurgh hys multiplicacioun,
> Thogh hyt were piped of a mous,
> Mot need come to Fames Hous.
>
> (782–86)

All sounds ever made—even those tiny squeaks "piped of a mous"—rise by means of their airy medium to end up in the House of Fame. This murine "piping" recalls Papias's verb (*pipilare*) to denote the chirping of hawks in his gloss on Priscian, underscoring the House of Fame's ties to voices of the "lower orders." Indeed, as this passage makes clear, it is a treasury for all forms of *vox*—"speche," "noyse," and "soun"—which commingle together, rendering even articulate language, as we will see, into a "confus matere" (1517) that emanates from the structure in a profusion of noisy whispers and murmurs.

To illuminate this confounding aural phenomenon, the eagle next offers the Dreamer an extended metaphor borrowed from early grammatical writing on *vox*:[52]

> I preve hyt thus—take hede now—
> Be experience; for yf that thow
> Throwe on water now a stoon,
> Wel wost thou hyt wol make anoon
> A litel roundell as a sercle,
> Paraunter brod as a covercle;
> And ryght anoon thow shalt see wel
> That whel wol cause another whel
> And that the thridde, and so forth, brother,
> Every sercle causynge other
> Wydder than hymselve was.
>
> (787–97)

The aural phenomenon of echo and amplification that takes place in Fame's house is akin to the rippling effect of a stone thrown into water. The effect of

52. For more on this line of influence, see Minnis, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer*, 203–8.

this "proof" is to explain the mysterious and invisible workings of sound in the visual language of metaphor, so that the Dreamer may better understand it. Yet the eagle goes on to stress that the "litel . . . sercle[s]" and "whel[s]" that "multipl[y] ever moo" (801) on a liquid surface are not just figures for the "multiplicacioun" of sounds that pass through Fame's House. Rather, they give a visual form to the very shape of the air as it carries sounds up to the House of Fame. He explains:

> And ryght thus every word, ywys,
> That lowd or pryvee spoken ys,
> Moveth first an ayr aboute,
> And of thys movynge, out of doubte
> Another ayr anoon ys meved;
> As I have of the watir preved,
> That every cercle causeth other,
> Ryght so of ayr, my leve brother:
> Everych ayr another stereth
> More and more, and speche up bereth,
> Or voys, or noyse, or word, or soun,
> Ay through multiplicacioun,
> Til hyt be atte Hous of Fame—
> Take yt in ernest or in game.
>
> (809–22)

Here, the eagle presents the pieces of broken air carrying a confusion of "voyse," "noyse," "word," and "soun" to Fame's house as discrete units—"an ayr," "another ayr"—each of which engenders other "cercle[s]," as in the rippling of the water that the eagle has just described. The eagle's efforts to teach by analogy and to give a material shape to the invisible substance and workings of sound are part of his general tendency to "preve . . . / Be experience" (787–88): to render abstract concepts into tangible or palpable forms, more fit for the Dreamer's understanding. Yet this proof, which is delivered as a lecture by a figure—however absurd—who is convinced of his own authority, is not sufficient. The eagle knows this. Before the close of book 2, the eagle assures the Dreamer that he will test out all he has just been told by moving through the world of Fame:

> Thou shalt have yet, or hit be eve,
> Of every word of thys sentence
> A preve by experience,

And with thyn eres heren wel
Top and tayl and everydel.
(876–80)

It is not enough to simply hear the eagle explain the workings of Fame. Instead the Dreamer must "heren wel," a process that involves his top, tail, and every portion of the body in between. Anchoring the realm of experience firmly in the body and the faculty of hearing, the eagle's formulation imagines that the confused noise of language that echoes from Fame's House provides a multisensory immersion that will envelop the Dreamer's body and senses.

As they approach the House of Fame, the Dreamer is overwhelmed and fearful of "the grete soun" (1025) he perceives from Fame's House. The eagle refers to it as "the grete swogh" (1031)—a term implying not only the sound of loud resounding, but also the feeling of a forceful or violent motion.[53] The Dreamer's own language to describe the experience emphasizes its all-encompassing physicality. When the eagle asks him what it sounds like, the Dreamer answers,

Peter, lyk betynge of the see,
. . . ayen the roches holowe,
Whan tempest doth the shippes swalowe,
And lat a man stonde, out of doubt,
A myle thens, and here hyt route;
Ore ells lyk the last humblynge
After the clappe of a thundering,
Whan Joves hath the air ybete.
But yt doth me for fere swete.
(1034–42)

The Dreamer's metaphors liken the roaring of Fame's House to tempestuous waves beating at rocks before they swallow up a ship and to the portentous thunder of Jove and so intensify the tactile nature of the sounds. Indeed, the sounds of Fame's house take up physical space: before setting the Dreamer down to approach Fame's house on his own, the eagle offers advice and comfort while they have "space / To speke" (1054–55), a formulation implying that once they are nearer the House of Fame, its noise will be

53. *MED*, s.v. "swough," n. 1 and n. 2, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary.

so loud it will overwhelm the space they inhabit, making them incapable of communicating without difficulty. Yet as he relinquishes the Dreamer, the eagle encourages him to

> Walke forth a pas,
> And take thyn aventure or cas
> That thou shalt fynde in Fames place.
> (1051–53)

Like the extra strings added to the lyre in Boethius's account of Timotheus of Mileteus, the sensory excesses of the House of Fame provide greater opportunity for chance occurrence—the "aventure or cas"—that will offer the Dreamer the noise that will become a crucial means of acquiring the experiential knowledge he lacks.

Noise and Fame's Two Houses

Once the eagle has released him onto the grounds of the House of Fame, the Dreamer continues his search for tidings. Fame's House resembles the Temple of Glass in its sumptuous visual splendor. The structure sits atop a "roch" that seems like "alum de glas," but in the Dreamer's estimation "shoon ful more clere" (1123–25). The play of light that the Dreamer notices outside the House of Fame extends to its interior, which seems to the Dreamer to be made entirely of "ston of beryle" (1184). It is decorated all over with "many subtil compassinges" (1188), which include "Babewynnes and pynacles, / Ymageries and tabernacles" (1189–90), all features that underscore its effect on the Dreamer's eyes. The phrase "I saw" appears frequently throughout his account, as it did in his narrative of the Temple of Glass in book 1. This time, however, the phrase "herd I" is interspersed (1201, 1243, 1245, 1313, etc.), signaling a continued move toward aurality.

Just as the eagle has promised, Fame's house renders the literate voice into noise through a scheme of echo and amplification. The *vox articulata* of the Latinate written tradition is broken up and jumbled into a confused melee of sounds.[54] As the Dreamer wanders through Fame's House, observing various processions of deserving and undeserving fame-seekers and shirkers, he notes in one area,

> The halle was al ful, ywys,
> Of hem that writen olde gestes

54. See Irvine, "Medieval Grammatical Theory," 868.

As ben on treës rokes nestes;
But hit a ful confus matere
Were alle the gestes for to here
That they of write, or how they highte.
(1514–19)

The voices of classical poets resound through the hallways of Fame's House. In a phrase echoing the grammatical terminology of the *vox confusa*, the Dreamer tells us they are perceptible only as a "ful confus matere." It seems that what the Dreamer hears are not the ordered grammatical voices of *literatura*, but instead a confusion of the *vox articulata*, broken into fragments. Though they were once namable as singular authorities, these authors of ancient "gestes" have become ubiquitous, as numerous as the rooks' nests the Dreamer has observed peppering the branches of trees. This comparison is telling. With its familiar and quotidian associations, the image of the rook's nest dismantles the authority of the ancient Latinate authors. It also associates them—and their voices—with birds, a species very often tied explicitly to the *vox confusa*. The image of the rook's nest also anticipates the next major structure the Dreamer will visit in his journey: the resounding House of Rumor, whose structure "mad of twigges" (1936) has been noted to resemble a variety of porous containers used among the laity, including a birdcage and an eel trap.[55] After the Dreamer observes this crowd of literary luminaries thronging like a murder of crows, he likens their voices to a "noyse . . . / That ferde as been doon in an hyve" (1521–22). While the House of Fame is filled with voices of the highest order according to grammatical standards, it is clear that they have been dismantled to their fundamental material element: sound.

Given the eagle's emphasis that the Dreamer will learn everything he has been told "by experience," it is no surprise that the Dreamer must move beyond what his guide has explicitly told him. The Dreamer does not ultimately find in the House of Fame the "tidings" he is in search of. He finds guidance from an encounter with another individual famester. The two exchange introductions:

[He] seyde "Frend, what is thy name?
Artow come hider to han fame?"

55. For a discussion of the House of Rumor as a birdcage, see Mary Flowers Braswell, "Architectural Portraiture in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 11 (1981): 109–12. For the suggestion of the eel trap, see Davis, "Fugitive Poetics in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," 119–23; Davis's discussion here also includes a useful overview of the range of scholarly interpretations of Chaucer's source(s) for the House of Rumor.

"Nay, for sothe, frend," quod y;
"I cam noght hyder, graunt mercy,
For no such cause, by my hed!
Sufficeth me, as I were ded,
That no wight have my name in honde.
I wot myself best how y stonde;
For what I drye, or what I thynke,
I wil myselven al hyt drynke,
Certeyn, for the more part,
As fer forth as I kan myn art."

(1871–82)

The Dreamer has not come to Fame's House to join the thronging crowds in the hope of gaining fame for himself. Instead, he insists on a self-contained control over his own name, claiming "I wot myself best how y stonde" and asserting "For what I drye, or what I thinke, / I wil myselven al hyt drynk." With the verbs *drien* and *drinken*, the Dreamer demonstrates that he is beginning to understand knowledge in terms of experience. The verb *drien*, meaning "to perform or do," but also "to suffer" and "to enjoy," embraces a broad array of emotional and physical experience and emphasizes the Dreamer's claim that he will "drink" in the world.[56]

But he has not yet learned to listen. By framing his experience as something he will do "[him]selven," the Dreamer eschews the sympathetic resonance that the eagle has linked to the oral and aural transmission of tidings from his "verray neyghebores." The anonymous friend calls attention to this fact, when he responds to the Dreamer's avowal of self-sufficiency by asking "But what doost thou here than?" (1883). With this question, the friend simultaneously asks "But what are you doing here, then?" but also, homophonically, "But what do you hear, then?" With this verbal resonance, he anticipates how the Dreamer will deepen his experience by listening in the House of Rumor.

The Dreamer's transition from the domain of Fame to that of Rumor reflects a shift from one major semantic valence of the classical concept of *fama* to another: from glory to gossip.[57] This trajectory amplifies the

56. *MED*, s.v. "drien," v. 2, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary.

57. For more on the ways these two semantic branches of *fama* were understood to be both distinct and in interplay through classical antiquity and the Middle Ages, see Gianni Guastella, *Word of Mouth: Fama and Its Personifications in Art and Literature from Ancient Rome to the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Dreamer's increasing immersion in lay forms of knowledge and expression. Chaucer's House of Rumor is a manifestation of *fama* as the talk of the commons. Unlike the ornate palatial structure of the House of Fame, the House of Rumor is built from the more commonplace medium of wicker or twigs. In its embodiment of lay and vernacular talk, the House of Rumor resounds with the tidings the Dreamer has been missing, though they are perceptible to the Dreamer only as noise. As a result of its "queynte" structure, we learn

> That, for the swough and for the twygges,
> This hous was also ful of gygges,
> And also ful eke of chirkynges,
> And of many other werkynges.
>
> (1941–44)

Taking grammatical hierarchies of *vox* into account, the sounds emanating from the House of Rumor are decidedly of a lower order of animacy. The term *chirkyng* and its related verb *chirken* applied primarily to birds and to inanimate objects, underscoring the sound's physicality in absence of reasoned intention and meaning. The *Promptorium parvulorum*, a fifteenth-century Latin–English Dictionary, uses "chyrkyng" to gloss *sibilatus*, the same term Priscian used to describe the human "hissing" (sibili) cited as an example of the *vox articulata illiterata*.[58] *Chirkynge* was also identified with nonhuman voices. In *The Canterbury Tales*, for example, Chaucer's Summoner describes how his Tale's devious friar "chirketh as a sparwe / With his lippes" (III. 1804–5). And in his *Boece*, a translation of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, Chaucer describes a field "chirkynge, [that] agriseth of cold by the felnesse of the winde" (I, metrum 6, 10). Applied to these nonhuman creatures and objects—a lecherous sparrow and a frost-cracking field—the term evokes the onomatopoetic sounds of Priscian and Isidore's *vox confusa*: the "crepitus" (rattling) cited by Priscian as an example of the *vox inarticulata illiterata* and the "stridor" (creaking) used by Isidore as an example of onomatopoeia.

As it "chirk[s]," the House of Rumor also produces "gygges," another word noteworthy for its tie to the sounds of lay experience. The Middle English noun *gigge* and its related verb *gigen* stem from the Old French verb *giguer* (to play the fiddle). They are believed to be related to the Modern English word "jig," referring to both the lively springing dance and the music

58. A. L. Mayhew, ed., *The Promptorium Parvulorum: The First English–Latin Dictionary* (London: EETS, 1908), 82.

that accompanies it.[59] These associations with lay musical practitioners recall the Boethian distinction between true musicians and mere performers and poets, the latter of whom know music by base instinct rather than reasoned mathematical judgment. By making the House of Rumor resonate with "gygges," Chaucer amplifies its status as an echobox of lay voices, sounding together in chaotic confusion. Indeed, both Middle English words—*gigge* and *gigen*—are used very rarely: the *MED* lists *The House of Fame* as the only example of the noun, and the verb is listed only in the fifteenth-century Latin–Middle English glossary, the *Medulla Grammatice*.[60] The rarity of these terms suggests their aural alterity in Chaucer's time: to readers and listeners of the poem, "gigge" would have sounded strange, a bit like noise. Such alterity accentuates the inscrutable and nonsensical nature of the sounds coming from the House of Rumor.

With its description of sound production through perpetual circular gyration "ever mo, as swift as thought" (1924), the House of Rumor performs what Chaucer's eagle has already described as the mechanism of sound, which emanates "ever moo" (801) in "litel roundell[s] as a sercle" (791). This mechanism is also evident in the overheard murmur the Dreamer perceives once he is within the house. He describes how

> every wight that [he] saugh there
> Rouned everych in others ere
> A newe tydynge prively.
>
> (2043–45)

The Dreamer proceeds to describe the resonating effect of the structure's din of gossip and vernacular voices:

> Whan oon had herd a thing, ywis,
> He com forth ryght to another wight,
> And gan him tellen anon-ryght
> The same that to him was told,
> Or hyt a forlong way was old,
> But gan somewhat for to eche
> To this tydynge in this speche
> More than hit ever was.
> And nat so sone departed nas
> Tho fro him, that he ne mette

59. See *OED*, s.v. "jig," https://www.oed.com.

60. *MED*, s.v. "gigge" n. 2 and "giggen" v., https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary.

With the thridde; and or he lette
Any stounde, he told him als;
Were the tydyge soth or fals,
Yit wolde he telle hyt natheles,
And evermo with more encres
Than yt was erst.

(2060–75)

This limitless game of telephone—the mechanism of the oral and aural transmission of tidings described here—recalls the ever-growing "litel . . . sercle[s]" described by the eagle in his physics lesson on sound. For Chaucer, this thrumming is experience, and it is at its most accessible in a chaotic world of lay sound and voice. Far from the eremitic and visual domain of the scholar, the Dreamer explains that not one person alive

Ne han the kunnynge to discryve
The thynges that I herde there,
What aloude, and what in ere.

(2056–58)

The Dreamer's insistence on this inability to describe his encounter surpasses standard humility topoi, calling attention to the sensory and experiential nature of the knowledge with which he comes into contact. It is a knowledge that resists being contained in language. In the domain of Rumor, the Dreamer is immersed in the sounds of language in excess of their meaning.

Little Circles and Poetic Form

Yet Chaucer is not content to show this dynamic in the characters and action of the poem. The form of the poem gives physical shape to these little circles of sound, performing the Dreamer's acquisition of experiential knowledge on the page and in the body of its readers and listeners. The jumbled information echoing from this structure enacts in readers the "swift thoughts" used to describe the house's circular movement. As he recounts the wide-ranging topics of the tidings resounding through the wicker structure, Chaucer's shift toward short syntactical units stresses the fragmented nature of the voices resounding through the wicker house:

And over alle the houses angles
Is ful of rounynges and of jangles

Of werres, of pees, of mariages,
Of reste, of labour, of viages,
Of abood, of deeth, of lyfe,
Of love, of hate, acord, of stryf,
Of loos, of lore, and of wynnynges,
Of hele, of seknesse, of bildynges,
Of faire wyndes, and of tempestes,
Of qwalm of folk, and ek of bestes;
Of dyvers transmutacions
Of estats, and eke of regiouns;
Of trust, of drede, of jelousye,
Of wit, of wynnynge, of folye;
Of plente, and of gret famyne,
Of chepe, of derth, and of ruyne;
Of good or mys governement,
Of fyr, and of dyvers accident.

(1959–76)

Rebecca Davis has noted how the form of this passage on the manuscript page and in the body enacts the "hools" apparent in Chaucer's description of the wicker house.[61] Visually, the repeated *O*s set off in a vertical row on the page inscribe the rippling effect described by the eagle as "every sercle caus[es] other" (796). In oral recitation, these lines produce the same result in the mouth as it shapes itself into a circle pronouncing the repeated "Of"s. In effect, the poem's form at this moment turns both the page and the body into a porous and resonant echo chamber like the House of Rumor itself.

I add that what is echoed is noise. *The House of Fame* contains numerous instances of the rhetorical trope of *repetitio*.[62] As we have seen, Dido's lament at the betrayal of Aeneas is one example. Indeed, with its repeated "Of"s this passage loosely recalls Dido's "O"-interjections—though their sounds are not identical, the shapes of the mouth in pronunciation are similar—and evokes the notion of noise as empty sound. Yet at seventeen lines, this passage surpasses Dido's repetition (and all other instances), becoming by far the longest example in the poem. It is, we might say, rhetorical repetition *ad absurdum*, a term I use in its full etymological sense as

61. Davis, "Fugitive Poetics in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," 127–29.
62. On rhetorical repetition in *The House of Fame*, see Minnis, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer*, 173.

"from-deafness" (*ab* + *surdus*). Through such repetition, the meaning of the words threatens to be lost to their physical forms. This emphasis on their sounds in the ear and shapes in the mouth and on the page renders readers deaf to the conceptual aspects of the language, but not to the experience of its sounds and feelings.

In this moment too, we can perceive how the rhythmic shape of Chaucer's poetry also approaches these circular movements. In the passage above, two lines—"Of abode, of deeth, of lyfe" (1963) and "Of plente, and of gret famine" (1973)—stand out for their stress on the first rather than second syllable and can be read to contain seven syllables rather than the usual eight used consistently throughout the poem. *The House of Fame*, like its precursor, *The Book of the Duchess*, is written in octosyllabic couplets, a style of verse borrowed from the French vernacular tradition. Scholars have shown the octosyllabic rhymed couplet to be tied specifically to the orality of popular French lyric and song.[63] Modern critics often compare this metrical form unfavorably to those Chaucer used in his later works. Indeed, they have tended to embrace *The Parliament of Fowls* as the first of Chaucer's more perfectly crafted works, a departure that marks a point of maturation from his early efforts in *The Book of the Duchess* and *The House of Fame*. Larry D. Benson, for example, notes that Chaucer has attained an "easy confidence of style notably lacking in [his] earlier work." He attributes this confidence in part to his use of a new meter unlike the four-beat couplet he used in *The House of Fame*, which "seems more suited to parodying rather than reproducing the classics."[64]

In describing the sounds of these octosyllabic couplets, critics have frequently resorted to the language of noise. In comparing Chaucer to Dante, one of his sources for *The House of Fame*, David Wallace writes of a particular passage describing the House of Fame: "Heard against the sonorous background of Dante's magisterial terzine, Chaucer's English couplets amount to little more than a nervous squeak."[65] Alastair Minnis notes that the "vice" of the octosyllabic form of verse is "its tendency to produce a monotonous and droning effect." He praises Chaucer for inserting seven-syllable lines

63. Evelyn Vitz, *Orality and Performance in Early French Romance* (Rochester, NY: Boydell and Brewer, 1999), 4–25.

64. Larry D. Benson, introduction to Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Parliament of Fowls," in *Riverside Chaucer*, 383.

65. David Wallace, "Chaucer's Italian Inheritance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 41.

like those above amidst the octosyllables, which, in Minnis's view "creat[e] interest" and offset the poem's droning.[66] Minnis's investment in "interest" suggests a more fundamental focus on intellectual engagement and attention. What is implicit in his formulation is that an experience of the poem that is purely bodily is undesirable, even to the point of being indulgent.

I read the "droning" form of the poem as Chaucer's means of ensuring that his poetry offers readers an opportunity to engage in the noise of language, a mode of poetic attunement that chimes with the experiential and sensory knowledge of the House of Rumor. Indeed, Chaucer acknowledges these lines and ties them to "lewed" or unlearned verse in his invocation at the beginning of book 3:

> O god of science and of lyght,
> Apollo, thurgh thy grete myght
> This lytel laste bok thou gye!
> Nat that I wilne, for maistrye,
> Here art poetical be shewed,
> But for the rym ys lyght and lewed,
> Yet make it somewhat agreable
> Though som vers fayle in a sillable.
>
> (1092–1097)

This self-awareness about the poem's halting and recursive structure suggests its larger design. Like the moment of narrative suspension experienced in reading Dido's lament, the stalls and starts of the poem's rhythm enact Chaucer's "litel . . . sercle[s]" of sound: just as the poem's readers—and listeners—settle into the repetitive sound patterning of the octosyllables, those lines that "fayle in a sillable" force them to halt and circle back, to settle into the repetition again.

In its famously unfinished nature, the narrative structure of *The House of Fame* performs the very process of resonant "multiplicacioun" that it describes. The poem ends with yet another invocation of the narrator's lack of wit, this time without continuation. He sees a man

> Which that y [nevene] nat ne kan;
> But he semed for to be
> A man of gret auctorite. . . .
>
> (2156–58)

66. Minnis, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer*, 172–73.

The poem ends, midsentence. The ending of Chaucer's poem demonstrates how Chaucer's authority, personified into a human figure at the very moment when the text breaks off, lies in a gap in articulate knowledge. Though initially scholars viewed the end of the poem as incomplete, a disjuncture that Chaucer always intended to fill, more recent scholarship has embraced the poem's imperfect lack of closure, pointing to other instances of Chaucer's "open endings" as evidence for his embrace of unknowing.[67] Such openness leaves room for creation beyond the boundaries of the text itself, a reaction to which the poem's long afterlife attests.[68]

As he describes the teeming mass of creaturely beings that fills the structure, the Dreamer points explicitly to "shipmen and pilgrimes" (2122) and to "pardoners, / Currours, and eke messagers" (2127–28) who tote along "boystes crammed ful of lyes / As ever vessel was with lyes" (2129–30). In these last lines, Chaucer's crude rime riche plays with the word "lyes"—a single sound that homophonically indicates both "lies" (stories) and "lees" (the dregs at the bottom of a wine cask). This soundplay amplifies the slipperiness of poetic noise and intensifies Chaucer's embrace of its surface sounds. By pointing to some of the characters (shipmen, pardoners, and pilgrims) who will make up *The Canterbury Tales*, the poem calls attention to Chaucer's authorial self-conception and his awareness of the trajectory of his own works. These characters all carry a myriad of stories ("lesinges," "tydynges," "lyes") with them in various containers, a hubbub that contributes to the noisy spoken fragments resounding through the Houses of Fame and Rumor. Finally, the Dreamer is fully attuned to this noise. He explains:

> And . . . I alther-fastest wente
> About, and dide al myn entente
> Me for to pleyen and for to lere,
> And eke a tydynge for to here.
>
> (2131–34)

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67. See Penelope Reed Doob, *The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 307–39, and Rosemarie P. McGerr, *Chaucer's Open Books: Resistance to Closure in Medieval Discourse* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 61–78.

68. In his 1483 edition of the poem, for example, the publisher William Caxton added a few last lines in which the Dreamer is awakened by the noises of the House of Rumor and concludes that the dream was telling him to "studye and rede alway." The tone-deafness of this ending perhaps calls attention to the great influence exerted by the technology of print on the material circumstances of reading. Caxton's emendation added his own name in the margin next to these lines, along with a note that Chaucer had left the poem unfinished. Yet William Thynne's 1532 edition of Chaucer's works adopted Caxton's ending but omitted his signature and note, a change that would prove long-lived, extending through later editions into the nineteenth century. See *Riverside Chaucer*, 990, n. 2158 and 1142, n. 2157.

The Dreamer whirls *about*, a word that implies his nonlinear, circular course in the House of Rumor's labyrinthine halls. In doing so, he hears, plays with, and learns from other pilgrims, as he will do through various personae in *The Canterbury Tales*. Tellingly, at this moment he holds back, informing readers that these stories "shal not *now* be told for me—" (2136, emphasis added). With this withholding, he emphasizes the gap in fully articulated knowledge from which *The Canterbury Tales* will emerge.

Chapter 5

"A Verray Jangleresse"

Experience, Authority, and the Blisse *of the Wife of Bath*

> Jingle a tinkle jaunted.
>
> —James Joyce, *Ulysses*, "Sirens" (220)

Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is a study in voice, structured by what David Lawton calls "an unprecedented display . . . of multiple tellers."[1] The Wife of Bath is among the loudest of these voices. Indeed, she is loud in multiple senses of the word. The Wife's skill in the arts of weaving (and in flirtation and seduction, Chaucer implies) has contributed to her tendencies toward self-display. Her clothing is fine and new, with accents of eye-catching red. Her tongue is garrulous. This chapter interrogates this multivalent loudness, showing how Chaucer adapts the trope from antimarriage authors like Walter Map and uses it to govern two of the Wife's most fundamental characteristics: her deafness and her "jangling" voice.

The first defining characteristic of the Wife of Bath in the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* is her deafness. She is introduced as "A good Wif . . . of biside Bathe, / But she was somedel deef, and that was scathe" (I. 445–46). Later in her Prologue, we learn that this deafness is the result of a beating by her husband Jankyn: a punishment for interrupting a lecture by tearing a leaf from his "book of wikked wyves" (III. 685). The Wife's deafness, in other words, is closely related to her relationship to texts. Her

1. David Lawton, *Voice in Later Medieval English Literature: Public Interiorities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

interruption signals her failure to listen in the way Jankyn requires; her destruction of the book extends this disrespect for textual authority and emphasizes a relationship to books and language that is particularly physical and material.

For several decades scholars have debated whether the Wife's deafness is best understood as a metaphorical or actual impairment. The early and influential exegetical scholarship of D. W. Robertson first outlined the terms of the Wife's "spiritual deafness": her inability to understand scriptural truth. For Robertson, this was an attribute that made the Wife an object of ridicule and derision for Chaucer and his audience. This argument was informed by Robertson's conviction that the Wife embodies "rampant 'femininity' *or* carnality," a telling equation that betrays his unquestioning acceptance of misogynist medieval ideas associating femininity with the frailties of the flesh.[2] Carolyn Dinshaw and other feminist scholars have since offered important corrections to Robertson's perspective, reasserting the importance of understanding the Wife's deafness in the material and literal terms that Chaucer lays out: as a physical manifestation of patriarchal violence on the female body.[3] This emphasis on the literalism of the Wife's deafness has also been taken up among scholars of disability studies and history, who use her as an important figure in reconstructing histories of deafness.[4]

This chapter combines a Robertsonian interest in the metaphorical valences of deafness with the commitments of feminism and disability studies. Like Robertson, I argue that the Wife's deafness indicates that she reads and listens in a certain way, errant from the literate standards upheld by clerics like her husband. But in my view, this does not necessarily make her an object of ridicule for Chaucer. Instead, the Wife exhibits what the experimental composer and theorist Michel Chion calls "reduced listening," following the French musicologist and composer Pierre Schaffer. This avenue of perception is defined by Chion as "the listening mode that focuses on the traits of sound independent of its cause and meaning. Reduced listening

2. D. W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962), 321 (emphasis added).

3. Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 130. Other feminist treatments of the poem reassert the metaphorical valences of the Wife's deafness as an indicator of the psychic damage of listening to patriarchal discourse. See for example Anne Laskaya, *Chaucer's Approach to Gender in the Canterbury Tales* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995), 181–82.

4. Edna Edith Sayers, "Experience, Authority, and the Mediation of Deafness," in *Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverberations*, ed. Joshua Eyler (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 81–92.

takes the sound—verbal, played on an instrument, noises, or whatever—as the object to be observed instead of as a vehicle for something else."[5]

In the antifeminist tradition from which Chaucer drew, such listening signaled an alienation from doctrinal truth, which rendered those who listened for sounds, like the Wife, into virtual embodiments of falsehood. This tradition stressed that the dangerous physicality of the female body rendered it less capable of hearing and understanding spiritual truth or expressing it in language.[6] The twelfth-century Welsh author Walter Map along with Chaucer's near contemporary William Langland—both of whom were influential to Chaucer's characterization of the Wife—offer particularly vivid examples of antifeminist notions of "superficial" feminine reading. Map's *Dissuasio Valerii ad Rufinus* outlines how the seductive voices of women, whose beauty veils hollowness, facilitate a manner of self-interested listening that emphasizes base personal pleasure rather than a higher spiritual truth or moral good. For Map, this was a form of listening that could corrupt weak men if they did not guard against it, and reduce them to the level of irrational beasts. The rough and unmusical voice of Map's narrator, Valerius, offers a contrasting form of noise that he promises will not distract Rufinus with its beauty. Valerius's repeated insistence on the rough and abrasive quality of his rhetorical style amounts to an extended humility topos and points to a crucial interpretive problem. The great irony of Map's *Dissuasio* is that it delivers a screed against "feminine" ornamentation and beauty in a highly complex and ornate style of Latin rhetoric. Map's high style is a means of matching the medium with the message, to adapt a phrase from Marshall McLuhan.[7] Its ornamentation is suited to the lofty morals of the text. The noise that Map rejects occurs when there is a disjunction between medium and message: when the beauty of the (usually female) voice is only at the level of its surface sounds, distracting from its deeper emptiness of "correct" moral content.

The model of self-interested listening outlined in Map's *Dissuasio* is also evident in William Langland's depiction of Lady Meed and her reading practices. Langland's feminine personification of reward bears a striking resemblance to the Wife in her rich clothing and seductive charms. Indeed, in her associations with flattery, Meed has been explicitly compared to Chaucer's

5. Michel Chion, "The Three Listening Modes," in Sterne, *The Sound Studies Reader*, 50.

6. On this important context, see Minnis, *Fallible Authors*, 170–245.

7. Marshall McLuhan's phrase "the medium is the message" was first introduced in his 1964 book *Understanding Media*. For a more recent edition, see McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

Wife.[8] Yet these two characters have more in common than their wealth and beguiling ways: they are both presented as superficial readers whose reading focuses on individual points that support their own desires rather than the spiritual truth conveyed by the text at large. In this, both Meed and the Wife offer early examples of ways that "reading in detail" has historically been associated with women and femininity, as Naomi Schor has outlined.[9] Moreover, both Meed and the Wife of Bath are closely associated with sins of the tongue, an element that is not incidental to their superficial reading. Just as their textual learning comes in one ear and out the other, so to speak, their voices are empty. This link between superficial reading and empty or idle talk is important to understanding the Wife's self-designation as "a verray jangleresse" (III. 638). In Middle English, *janglen* and its related forms referred most broadly to chatter, gossip, or other forms of idle talk, a vice that scholars have explored widely in connection to the Wife of Bath.[10] According to the *OED*, the verb "jangle" was not explicitly tied to noise in the sense of discordant or unmusical sounds until the late fifteenth century.[11] Influenced by uses of the related word *ginglen*, Chaucer, I argue, is among the first to use the verb *jangle* in its sense as noise, specifically a kind of sound that Chaucer associates with worldly gain and personal profit.[12]

In short, the Wife of Bath listens with an ear toward her own earthly desire rather than the doctrinal truth that is imposed upon her. The result of this mislistening is, according to clerical authorities, a lying, hollow voice. Jankyn's deafening blow to the Wife is a correction for this "spiritual deafness." I argue that with this gesture, Jankyn brutally writes the Wife's spiritual condition in and on her body, forcing a correlation between external sign and perceived internal state in an act that exposes the violence of a clerical insistence on doctrinal truth. In this way, the Wife's deafness is both a cause and an effect of her disregard for the voices of male authority figures and the morals they convey. Yet for Chaucer, the Wife's "reduced listening" is not entirely a disability but a form of lay literacy. Through the Wife of

8. Douglas Wurtele, "The Bane of Flattery in the World of Chaucer and Langland," *Florilegium* 19 (2002): 1–25. For more on Meed's associations with sins of the tongue, see Andrew Galloway, *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 258–60.

9. Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

10. In addition to Wurtele, "The Bane of Flattery," see, for example, Phillips, *Transforming Talk* and Karma Lochrie, *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 56–92, especially 56–61. See also Sandra Bardsley, *Venomous Tongues: Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 61–63.

11. See *OED*, s.v. "jangle" v., https://www.oed.com.

12. See *OED*, s.v. "jingle" v., https://www.oed.com.

Bath, Chaucer offers an extended meditation on the voice as a purveyor of experience—one that, as this book has shown, is part of a larger impulse among vernacular authors to validate lay perception and expression.

In a similar vein, the Wife's jangling has purpose. Though idle talk has often been understood as a designation and proscription used to silence the female voice, Chaucer presents the Wife's jangling as lay form of understanding and expression, and as an alternative to clerical authority. The Wife's noise gives voice to her knowledge based in experience and bodily pleasure. The Wife's jangling embraces multiplicity, doubleness, and playful misdirection. Much like the clamor of Margery Kempe, the Wife's feminine noise offers sensory experience as a counterpoint to the dogmatic communication of meaning—here exemplified in the binary logic of crime and punishment—that is associated with those in power. Indeed, attending closely to feminine voices offers a way to understand the most troubling detail of The Wife's Tale: the rapist knight's apparent exoneration at the close of the tale. I argue that the knight's release from punishment with the help of the loathly lady can also be read as a powerful reorientation of gendered authority by means of voice. The Wife's double appears to defer to her husband yet, I argue, also reasserts the authority of blissful experience. In doing so, the voice of the loathly lady multiplies the interpretive potential at the close of The Wife's Tale, immersing readers in a form of deafness resembling the Wife of Bath's own. Like Chion's "reduced listening," however, this deafness ultimately amplifies perception—both sensation and insight—with an intensely material experience of language.

Materiality, Corporeality, and the Wife of Bath

The Wife of Bath is prodigiously focused on the material world and its excesses. As a skilled cloth-maker, she is among the wealthier pilgrims in the company, as indicated by her frequent travel on pilgrimage across Europe and the Holy Land (I. 463–66) as well as her possession of fine clothing. Adept at sartorial self-presentation, the Wife's shoes are "ful moyste and newe" (I. 457). Chaucer ties the Wife to material quite literally, with the detail that the "coverchiefs" piled upon her head "weyeden ten pound" (I. 453–54). The Wife's sartorial excess indicates a tendency toward ostentation evident in her affiliation with the color red. Her hose or tights are "of fyn scarlet reed" (I. 456), a detail that emerges again in the "gaye scarlet gytes" (III. 559) she wears to seduce her fifth husband, Jankyn. She is again linked to this "boold" color with the detail that her face is "faire, and reed of hewe" (I. 458). This emphasis on the Wife's physicality and materiality goes

hand in hand with a focus on her body and sexuality. In her General Prologue portrait we learn that she has had five husbands, "Withouten [not counting] oother compaignye in youthe" (I. 461), though she never mentions children. In other words, not only has the Wife been married more than most, her husbands are not the full extent of her sexual experience, which she pursues emphatically for her own profit—whether material wealth or pleasure—over a sanctioned impulse toward procreation.[13]

Alastair Minnis has shown how the "excessive" carnality and absence of rational judgment associated with the female body was understood as an impediment to women's ability to understand and to preach the word of God in the Middle Ages.[14] The Wife's body is marked so that her improperly carnal vocalization is legible to those who read her. She explains:

> Gat-tothed I was, and that bicam me weel;
> I hadde the prente of seinte Venus seel.
> As help me God, I was a lusty oon.
>
> (III. 603–5)

Both the Wife's seal of Venus and her "gat-tothed" grin are signs of her luxurious nature.[15] More pointedly, the gap in her teeth points to the Wife's particular bodily and vocal openness—her incontinence of sexuality and words. Medieval sermons against sins of the tongue frequently advanced the idea that the tongue was "naturally" guarded by the double walls of the teeth and the lips.[16] Chaucer's Manciple uses this homiletic commonplace

13. The Wife's corporeality has often been read in terms of textuality. As Carolyn Dinshaw and other scholars have shown, the Wife's preoccupation with cloth and clothing draws attention to her role as a text to be uncovered and read by her husbands. See Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*. See also Heather Hill-Vasquez, "Chaucer's Wife of Bath, Hoccleve's Arguing Women, and Lydgate's Hertford Wives: Lay Interpretation and the Figure of the Spinning Woman in Late Medieval England," *Florilegium* 23, no. 2 (2006): 171–77. John Alford has suggested that the emphasis on bright color and excess in Chaucer's description of the Wife recalls the empty splendor of Lady Rhetoric in the *Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, by the late antique Platonist philosopher Martianus Capellanus (whose work Chaucer alludes to on several occasions). See John Alford, "The Wife of Bath vs. the Clerk of Oxford: What Their Rivalry Means," *CR* 21, no. 2 (1986): 121. These readings call attention to how the Wife personifies empty rhetoric that stresses surface over substance.

14. For a recent treatment, see for example, Minnis, *Fallible Authors*, 170–245.

15. For more on the Wife and other pilgrims in relation to medieval physiognomy, see Walter Clyde Curry, *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1926), especially 91–118.

16. For a discussion of the metaphor of the tongue "walled" by teeth and lips in relation to homiletic literature and The Manciple's Tale, see Edwin Craun, *Lies, Slander, and Obscenity in Medieval English Literature: Pastoral Rhetoric and the Deviant Speaker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 202–3.

in his exemplum against gossip, for example, as he moralizes at the end of his tale:

> My sone, God of his endelees goodnesse
> Walled a tonge with teeth and lippes eke,
> For man sholde hym avyse what he speeke.
> (IX. 322–24)

Though some manuscripts read "gap-tothed," suggesting a lack of complete integrity and closure, the more commonly accepted "gat-tothed" is particularly compelling in combination with the homiletic metaphor of the walled tongue. In this formulation, "gat" comes from the Old English *gæt* or "gate." It thus points to an opening or breach in the implied portcullis of the teeth and underscores the Wife's promiscuity of the mouth.[17] In a related formulation, female genitalia were also often characterized in terms of "openings" or "doorways" in medieval medical literature. Vernacular English translations of the twelfth-century compendium of women's medicine attributed to Trotula, for example, use the term *weket* (gate).[18] With these homiletic and medical resonances, the Wife's oral openness is suggestively linked to her sexuality in a way that accentuates the physicality of her voice.

This broad emphasis on the Wife's corporeality and her bodily and vocal openness has governed treatments of the Wife's relationship to clerical power for decades of Chaucerian scholarship. Feminist scholars like Carolyn Dinshaw have stressed the ways that the Wife's speech calls attention to her misogynist environment and her own imprisonment in patriarchal culture and language.[19] More recently, Alastair Minnis has shown how the Wife's tale expresses sound moral teaching, even from a grotesque and excessively feminine body. In doing so, Minnis highlights how the Wife's intellectual training stems almost entirely from listening to her husband Jankyn, a clerk trained at

17. See explanatory note in *Riverside Chaucer*, 818, n. 468.

18. See, for example, Alexandra Barratt, ed., *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing: A Middle English Version of Material Derived from the Trotula and Other Sources* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 44. For a scholarly discussion of this term, see Monica Green, "From 'Diseases of Women' to 'Secrets of Women': The Transformation of Gynecological Literature in the Early Middle Ages," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30, no. 1 (2000): 11 and 31, n. 23; Gail Kern Paster has also helpfully outlined how the idea of women as "leaky vessels" carried into early modern drama. See Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

19. Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*. See also Barrie Ruth Strauss, "The Subversive Discourse of the Wife of Bath: Phallocentric Discourse and the Imprisonment of Criticism," *ELH* 55, no. 3 (1988): 527–54.

Oxford. She is thus, in the terminology of medieval scholasticism, an "*auditrix*" of philosophy far beyond what was deemed appropriate for the laity.[20] But if the Wife has listened to more theological and moral argumentation than most of her lay peers, she is averse to dogma, failing—or refusing—to absorb the essence of those arguments.

The Wife's knowledge of learned texts from patristic, antifeminist, and misogamist traditions is widely acknowledged.[21] It is this tendency toward revoicing and citation that secures her role as a "noble prechour" (III. 165), in the words of the Pardoner, Chaucer's other questionable evangelist.[22] The list of authors that the Wife integrates, caricatures, or ventriloquizes throughout her Prologue is long and includes the church patriarchs Saint Paul and Saint Jerome, among others. Despite her wide-ranging knowledge of learned sources, her interpretations are nearly always out of context and self-interested. She embraces Paul's grudging advocacy of marriage with the wry observation "Bet is to be wedded than to brynne" (III. 52). She acknowledges the moral supremacy of virginity but insists that while Paul may advise women to be virgins, "He put it in oure owne juggement" (III. 68). Sensibly, she defends this stance with the rhetorical question "And certes, if ther were no seed ysowe, / Virginity than wherof sholde it growe?" (III. 71–72). This tendency has been read both as evidence of the Wife's inability to learn the moral lessons of her husband Jankyn and as an indication of the Wife's expert deployment of academic techniques of argumentation.[23] In other words, even as the Wife has been deaf to the specific content of her husband's lectures, she has not been deaf to his verbal process. Her absorption of academic technique—the performance or practice of argumentation over the content of its lessons—is an important indicator of the embodied style of learning that informs her emphasis on experience over authority.

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20. Minnis, *Fallible Authors*, 248. For further discussion of the term *auditrix* (which Minnis translates "studentess") in the intellectual economy of late medieval England, see 183–85.

21. Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* and H. Marshall Leicester, *The Disenchanted Self: Representing the Subject in the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). See also Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 280–321, and Andrew Galloway, "Marriage Sermons, Polemical Sermons, and the Wife of Bath's Prologue," *SAC* 14 (1992): 3–30.

22. For more on the Wife's role as a preacher, see Minnis, *Fallible Authors*; Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*; Galloway, "Marriage Sermons."

23. Robertson explains the Wife's self-interested quotation as a function of her being deaf to spiritual sense in *A Preface to Chaucer*, 317–22. Minnis outlines the Wife's expert argumentation in *Fallible Authors*, 253–57.

Seductive Sound and Walter Map's Dual Theories of Noise

The Welsh author Walter Map (ca. 1140–1210), who composed his *Dissuasio Valerii ad Rufinus* in Latin, offers an example of a pervasive antifeminist understanding of such somatic materiality in relation to language and listening. Numbering among those Latin texts included in Jankyn's *Book of Wicked Wives*, the *Dissuasio* was a definite influence on Chaucer as he conceived of the character of the Wife of Bath. Map writes from the perspective of a cleric named Valerius, who attempts to persuade his friend Rufinus not to marry and instead to remain devoted to a clerical life of intellectual pursuit. With its argument against marriage, the *Dissuasio* is often dubbed a misogamist or "antimarriage" text. Its argument, however, is much larger, encompassing not only a rejection of marriage, but also a disavowal of the physical world and the lusts of the flesh that it represents. Map's project, by way of his fictional I-persona, Valerius, is to juxtapose the life of the mind practiced within the all-male community of clerics with the life of the body and the physical world that Rufinus will enter upon marriage. Calling himself "the prophet of truth not of desire," Valerius makes an invidious comparison between himself and the women who threaten to seduce Rufinus away from intellectual life.[24] Rufinus must choose between pursuing the truth in Valerius's voice or following a female voice that both conveys and incites desire. Rufinus, whose name comes from the Latin "rufus" or "red-haired," draws on long-standing medieval physiognomic associations linking ruddy hair and complexions (like that of the Wife as well) with libido, anger, and trickery.[25]

Valerius chides Rufinus for his weakness in succumbing to the allurements of women and the carnality that they represent, emphasizing the seductions of the female voice. He rebukes Rufinus, "You love flatterers (*gnatones*) and the girls in the comedies, who whisper of sweet enticements to come, and above all, you love Circe, who for you will pour out joys full of the scent of sweetness you sigh for, so that you might err."[26] Circe, the witch of Greek and Roman mythology who allures Ulysses's sailors to her island and turns them into pigs, is a fitting figure for the seductions of the flesh that Valerius

24. "Ideo loqui prohibeor veritatis augur, non voluntatis." Map, *Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves*, 1:122–23.

25. Map, *Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves*, 1:197.

26. "Gnatones diligis et comedas, qui dulces presusurrant illecebras, et precipue Circen, que tibi suspira[t]e suavitatis aromate gaudia plena perfundet, ut fallaris." Map, *Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves*, 1:123.

hopes Rufinus may overcome. He praises Ulysses for his fortitude against such feminine enchantment with an allusion linking Circe to other monstrous female figures: "Ulysses was enchanted by the music of the Sirens, but because he knew their voices and Circe's cups, he made himself strong with the bonds of truth so as to avoid the whirlpool."[27] For Valerius, heroic men must guard against the seductive pleasures of the female voice, empty of truth.

The term Valerius first uses to refer to Rufinus's witchy women—*gnatones*—is a richly allusive trove associating such women with dangerous seduction. In adjectival form, *gnatonicus* is glossed as "parasitus vel Vir impurus et nihili" (a parasite or a man who is impure and of nothing).[28] The earliest listed quotation dates from the beginning of the fifteenth century, underscoring the relative rarity of the term, especially as Map was writing several centuries earlier. Ralph Hanna and Traugott Lawler gloss the term simply as "an allusion to the flatterer of Terrence's *Eunuchus*." Indeed, with his fawning blandishments—a form of "empty" speech that appeals to superficial vanity and lust rather than the intellectual pursuit of truth—Terrence's Gnathus would seem like a fitting analogue for Rufinus's seducers.[29]

Yet Hanna and Lawler do not acknowledge another suggestive resonance. If the term *gnatones* is most obviously a reference to Terrence's Gnathus, it also seems to play upon a metaphorical link between flatterers and parasites by punning on the English word "gnat." The word had been used since at least the late ninth century as a term for the small flying insect that flies and bites; it also referred more broadly to "a symbol of something small or inconsequential."[30] The West Saxon Gospels (ca. 990), an Old English translation of the Gospels, suggestively use the English term "gnat" to translate the Latin *culex* in a passage from the Gospel of Matthew that shares Map's angst about the seductive beauty of surface pleasures. Christ warns his acolytes to follow good doctrine and refute the bad example of the scribes and Pharisees:

> Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites who pay tithe of mint and anise, and cumin, and have let alone the weightier things of the

27. "Delectatus est Ulixes simphonia Syrenum, sed quia Syrenum voces et Circes pocula novit, veritatis vinculis sibi vim fecit, ut vitaret voraginem." Map, *Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves*, 1:124.

28. Charles du Fresne Sieur Du Cange et al., *Glossarium mediae et infirmae latinitatis*, s.v. "gnatonicus," http://ducange.enc.sorbonne.fr/GNATONICUS?clear=1.

29. Map, *Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves*, 1:198.

30. *MED*, s.v. "gnat," https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary. See also *OED*, s.v. "gnat" n. 1, https://www.oed.com.

> law, judgment, and mercy and faith. These things you ought to have done, and not to leave those others undone. Blind guides who strain out a gnat (*gnæt*, *culex*) but swallow a camel!
>
> Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you make clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, within you are full of extortion and uncleanness. Thou blind Pharisee, first make clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside also may become clean.
>
> Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites because you are like whited sepulchers, which outwardly appear to men beautiful, but within are full of dead men's bones and of all filthiness. So you also outwardly indeed appear to men just, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.[31]

This biblical passage denounces surface cleanness and beauty when it hides a filthy or polluted inner substance, just as Map condemns the hollow beauty of women's voices and their potential for dangerous seduction. This is a striking resonance—one that suggests that Map may have drawn from this early use of the English word *gnæt*, as well as from the Latin character *Gnathus*, in describing the alluring drone of Rufinus's flatterers.[32] With this bilingual pun, the vernacular English term contaminates Map's Latin in much the same way that the women are said to insidiously pollute Rufinus.

Such contamination through feminine beauty is an important feature of the *Dissuasio*. Addressing Rufinus directly, Valerius complains, "The ministers of Babel furnish you honeyed poison; it goes in pleasantly and pleases you, and draws away the impulse of your spirit."[33] Later annotations by the Oxford Franciscan John Ridewall have more to say about Map's "ministers

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31. See Matthew 23:23–27. For parallel text Latin with this translation, see Ziolkowski, *The Vulgate Bible*, 6:132–35. For the West Saxon Gospel translation, see Benjamin Thorpe, ed., *Đa Halgan Godspel on Englisc: The Anglo-Saxon Version of the Holy Gospels* (New York: George P. Putnam, 1851), 53–54.

32. Chaucer had certainly read Map's *Dissuasio* and used it in constructing the Wife of Bath. It is possible he drew from the nuances of the term *gnatones* to draw out associations between "empty" feminine speech and noise in his characterization of the Wife of Bath. By around the time Chaucer was writing *The Canterbury Tales* the gnat's established associations with biting and blood-sucking were also linked to the noise that ultimately led to its Latin name *Culex pipiens* or "piping gnat." John Trevisa's Middle English translation of Bartholomaeus's *De proprietatibus rerum* writes, for example, "The gnatte is a litil flye and hatte culex and haþ þat name of *aculeo* 'a stenge,' for he soukeþ blood and haþ in his mouþ a pipe, as hit were a pricke. . . . By continual flappynge of wynges a makeþ noyse in þe eyre as þogh he hurried. . . . And greueþ slepinge men wiþ noyse & wiþ bytinge and wakeþ hem of here reste." Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things*, 1:624.

33. "Propinant tibi mellitum toxicon ministri Babel; blande ingreditur et delectate, et impetum spiritus tui conducit." Map, *Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves*, 1:122.

of Babel" as they link this passage to an account by Peter Comestor of the biblical King Zedekiah. According to Comestor, Zedekiah was humiliated in front of the Babylonian court when he was given "a delicious laxative drink" that caused him to evacuate his bowels shamefully in public.[34] In interpreting the phrase "ministers of Babel" it seems that Ridewall downplayed or overlooked a resonance with the biblical account of the Tower of Babel, an allusion that draws attention to the incomprehensibility of Map's feminine charmers. Rather, in juxtaposing these two stories, Ridewall sets up an analogy between Map's "honeyed poison" and Comestor's laxative drink, interpreting "ministers of Babel" as sorcerers of the Babylonian court. To imbibe the beautiful evil of the feminine voice is to lose all bodily integrity and control, becoming a small puddle of brown liquid. Without steeling himself against such pleasures, Rufinus runs the risk of losing the vitality that makes him male and human. As Valerius notes, citing the myth of Zeus "mooing after" Europa, "goodness exalted him [Jove] above the heavens, but a woman made him equal to the beasts. A woman can make you moo too, unless you are greater than Jove, whose majesty no one else has equaled."[35] The once-powerful voice of Zeus is reduced to the animalistic bellow of a lovesick cow, mooing after its fancy.

Indeed, Map often compares voices to various animals in order to set up a dichotomy of noise that informs his theories of verbal aesthetics. On the one hand, the seductive voices of women—those "ministers of Babel" whose vocal beauty hides a vacuous or malicious intent—is a form of noise. On the other hand, so is Map's own avowedly rough and homely style, at least if we are to believe his persona Valerius. This is perhaps most evident as Valerius compares his voice among Rufinus's feminine charmers to that of the goose among swans, declaring that "the swans boom forth your death like an organ (*organant*), the goose squawks (*strepit*) your salvation."[36] Here Map draws from Virgilian references to the sack of Rome by Celtic tribes ca. 390 BCE, which narrate how a prescient goose enabled a Roman victory by warning against impending invasion. Map places the soothsaying goose among a flock

34. For more on this story and other annotations of Map's *Dissuasio*, see Traugott Lawler, "Medieval Annotation: The Example of the Commentaries on Walter Map's 'Dissuasio Valerii,'" in *Annotation and Its Texts*, ed. Stephen A. Barney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 94–107.

35. "Quem bonitas super celos extulit, femina brutis comparavit. Poterit et te femina cogere ad mugitum si non es Iove maior, cuius magnitudini nemo alius par fuit." Map, *Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves*, 1:128–29.

36. "Organant tibi olores interitum, anser salute strepit." Map, *Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves*, 1:124–25.

of swans, implying that their resounding cacophony drowns out his own feeble, but truthful squawks.[37]

It is significant that all of Valerius's birds—including his own avian alter-ego, the goose—make noise. Yet despite the apparent overlap between Valerius and his feminine admirers, the verbs used to refer to their expression imply a hierarchical relationship, suggesting that Valerius presents his own voice as a kind of noise. While the Latin term *strepere*, used to refer to Valerius's anserine voice, was common, the verb *organare*, denoting the expression of the swans, was relatively rare.[38] In English, "organ" was employed as a noun to denote a variety of musical instruments. Though used more rarely as a verb, like its Latin counterpart *organare*, "to organ" was, as of the eleventh century, used to denote singing *as accompaniment*. The *OED* lists Ælfric's *Grammar* as the only early use of "to organ" as a verb in English before the eighteenth century. Ælfric glosses the Latin *succino*, meaning "I sing to" or "I accompany in speech" with the Old English words *undersinge* and *orgnige*.[39] While Map may or may not have been aware of this passage from Ælfric, I do suggest he is using the Latin *organare* in a similar sense as excessive or unnecessary vocalization—the voice as adornment—to accentuate the shallow beauty of the swans' voices in contrast with his own humble, yet truthful squawks. This characterization of Valerius's voice as noise amounts to a form of the humility topos: Valerius's own rough voice is preferable to the hollow and effeminate smooth talking of Rufinus's seducers, which appeals to the body rather than the soul of the listener.

The dichotomy of noise presented in this passage is key to understanding Map's theories of vocal aesthetics. Despite his claims to humility, Map's style, as I hope my reading has begun to make clear, is densely allusive and often rhetorically ornate. As Hanna and Lawler write in their introduction, the *Dissuasio* "shimmers in its unusual reliance on allusiveness and verbal indirection."[40] This rhetorical finesse is evident in many ways and at many moments, but here it will suffice to note one instance in which Map makes use of alliteration in order to draw out the didactic lesson of his account. Valerius urges Rufinus to be like Ulysses, arming himself against the feminine seducers of his voyage. I quote it here in the original Latin in order to accentuate aural elements: "Delectatus est Ulixes ***s***imphonia ***S***yrenum, ***s***ed quia ***S***yrenum

37. See *Aeneid* 8:655–62 and *Eclogues* 9:36.

38. *Glossarium mediae* directs to "organum." See Du Cange et al., *Glossarium mediae et infirmae latinitatis*, s.v. "organare," http://ducange.enc.sorbonne.fr/ORGANUM.

39. See *OED*, s.v. "organ" v., https://www.oed.com.

40. Ralph Hanna and Traugott Lawler, introduction to Map, *Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves*, 1:53.

*v*oces et Circes pocula novit, *v*eritatis *v*inculis sibi *v*im fecit, ut *v*itaret *v*oraginem" (Ulysses delights in the music of the sirens, but because he knew their voices and Circe's cups, he made himself strong with the bonds of truth so as to avoid the whirlpool).[41] The rhetorical virtuosity and adornment of Map's own language befits his own lofty morals and devotion to spiritual truth. By contrast, the beautiful voices of Rufinus's admirers is simply skin deep. Its appeal to the senses masks its diversion from the truth.

The aesthetic implications for Map's dual theories of noise become clearer as Valerius addresses his friend's improper attention to rhetorical tropes and figures rather than content. He remarks on how he expects Rufinus to be reading his dissuasion:

> I see you now with a sneering attitude running over what you are reading at top speed and ignoring the meaning while you anticipate the figures of speech. You anticipate this muddy river's flowing away, or these dregs' running off to be succeeded by a pure flow of words, but in vain; for brooks must be similar to their source, whether muddy or clear. The defect of my speech expresses the unskillfulness of my heart, and the hump-backed unevenness of my style offends your fastidious soul.[42]

For Valerius, problems arise when speech with beautiful style springs from a dirty source. Unlike the foul women who attempt to seduce Rufinus with sweet nothings, Valerius's own "hump-backed" style transparently expresses the knowledge (however imperfect) of his heart, if only Rufinus would read him correctly. Imagining the process of reading as locomotion, Valerius chastises Rufinus for speeding through his malformed but truthful words in an effort to access a higher style. This reading to fulfill one's own personal desires is, in essence, an extension of Rufinus's self-interested listening for personal pleasure. Just as his focus is on the surface-level sounds of his seducers' voices, he attends to the style of Valerius's letter rather than its substance.

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41. Map, *Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves*, 1:124–25. For a discussion of this passage as an example of Map's rhetorical virtuosity, see Hanna and Lawler's introduction, 1:53–54.

42. "Video te iam fastidienti animo tota celeritate percurrere que legis, et sentencias non attendere sed expectare scemata. Frustra expectas dum hic turbidis amnis defluat, aut dum hec feculentia secedens pura sibi fluenta subroget; similes enim sui fontis oportet esse rivulos, turbidos aut claros. Sic impericiam cordis mei vicium oracionis exprimit, et strumosa dictionem imparitas delicatum offendit animum." Map, *Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves*, 1:130–31.

Reading "Lyk a Lady" in Langland's *Piers Plowman*

This model of self-interested reading—and its links to femininity—was pervasive in medieval England. I turn now to another example of it, closer to Chaucer's own time, in order to demonstrate the widespread purchase of these ideas and to demonstrate their proximity to discourses on sins of the tongue. Though there are important distinctions—William Langland's Lady Meed is an allegorical personification, not a woman—it is instructive to place Langland's figure for "reward" in conversation with Chaucer's Wife of Bath.[43] Like the Wife, Meed is associated throughout the poem's first vision with excesses: pecuniary, sartorial, erotic, and vocal. She appears to the Dreamer "wonderliche ycloþed" (B. 2. 8) and, like the Wife (not to mention Map's Rufinus), visibly accentuated with the color red, which Langland emphasizes four times in the space of six lines. Observing Meed for the first time, the Dreamer notes:

> Fetisliche hire fyngres were fretted with gold wyr,
> And þereon rede rubies as rede as any gleede,
> And diamaundes of derrest pris and double manere saphires,
> Orientals and ewages, enuenymes to destroye.
> Hire robe was ful riche, of reed scarlet engreyned
> Wiþ ribanes of reed gold and of riche stones.
>
> (B. 2. 11–16)

Meed's visual splendor has a striking effect on the Dreamer, who admits, "Hire array me rauysshed, swich richesse sauȝ I neuere" (B. 2. 17). Like Rufinus at the mercy of the Siren-like flatterers, Meed's ravishing surface display overwhelms the Dreamer's senses and renders him full of "wonder" (B. 2. 18).

Meed's attention to surface is evident in her reading practices as well. At the conclusion of the poem's first vision, during a debate with Conscience, the medieval faculty of the mind or heart, she reveals her approach to reading. As Conscience rejects the possibility of marriage to Meed, he describes the day that "Resoun shal regne and reaumes gouerne" (B. 3. 285),

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43. Indeed, it may be that Chaucer was influenced by Langland's depiction of Meed as he crafted the character of the Wife. The figure of Meed first appears in Langland's A text of *Piers Plowman*, which is typically (though not exclusively) dated in the late 1360s. The general critical consensus for the date of Chaucer's Wife of Bath is between 1392 and 1395. For the dating of Langland's revisions to *Piers Plowman*, see Hanna, "The Versions and Revisions of Piers Plowman," 38. For the dating of Chaucer's work, see Larry D. Benson, introduction to *Riverside Chaucer*, xxv.

a time when pecuniary reward shall no more be "maistre," and Christendom shall instead be ruled by "loue and lowenesse and leautee togideres" (B. 3. 290–91). In response to this, Meed waxes "wroþ as þe wynd" (B. 3. 331), turning to the bible in her own defense:

> "I kan no Latyn," quod she, "clerkis wite þe sothe!
> Se what Salomon seiþ in Sapience bokes:
> That þei þat 3yuen 3iftes, þe victorie wynneþ,
> & muche worshipe haue[þ] þerwith, as Holy Writ telleþ—
> *Honorem adquiret qui dat munera*."
>
> (B. 3.332–36)

Meed's citation of Proverbs 22:9, "He who gives money will acquire honor," offers a classic demonstration of how medieval theologians warned one should not read the bible: she takes her biblical allusion out of context, neglecting the larger meaning of the text. As Conscience acidly explains:

> I leue wel lady, . . . þat þi Latyn be trewe,
> Ac þow art lik a lady þat radde a lesson ones,
> Was *omnia probate*, and þat pleased hire herte—
> For þat lyne was no lenger at þe leues ende.
> Hadde she loked þat oþer half and þe leef torned,
> She sholde haue founden fel[l]e words folwynge þerafter:
> *Quod bonum est tenete*—Truþe þat text made.
>
> (B. 3. 337–43)

For Conscience, the lesson in the first half of the phrase "omnia probate"—"try all things"—is particularly pleasing to the heart of a lady like Meed. In postclassical Latin such as the Vulgate, from which this quotation is drawn, *probare* meant "to test," "try," or "learn by experience." The word entered the English language as *preven*, acquiring a broader semantic range that added "to feel" and "to taste" to its connotations of experiential learning. With these associations, it is easy to imagine how a sentiment like "try" or even "taste all things" might appeal to the ravishing sensuality of a figure like Meed. In Conscience's view, a "lady" reader misses the fundamental point of the proverb: "Quod bonum est tenete"—"hold what is good." Instead, she cherry-picks a line that condones what she most wants in life: to taste all things. Meed's reading is likewise self-interested. If she had only turned the page, Conscience continues, she would have found the conclusion of the proverb she has cited: *"Animam autem aufert accipiencium, etc."* The full proverb—"He who gives money will acquire honor, but he corrupts the soul

of the receiver"—conveys a much different sentiment than Meed understands it to. Armed with this knowledge, Conscience roundly condemns Meed for her self-interested and incomplete reading.

This episode draws the character of Meed, and the idea of reward that she represents, away from the spiritual realm of conscience and Christian ethics and aligns her with the superficial, physical world. Meed's "bad" reading confirms her association with self-interested desires over spiritual truth and the larger social good. Like Rufinus who overlooks the truth by running too swiftly over Valerius's admonitory letter, she glosses over biblical morals by taking in the sound of the words but not their "true" meaning. Without an internalized knowledge of the correct form of Christian morality or love, Meed's voice is, as the Apostle Paul might say, "like sounding brass or tinkling cymbal."[44]

Indeed, like Langland's personification of Sloth (and many other figures in *Piers Plowman*), Meed is, by way of her family (especially her chosen mate, False), associated with verbal artifice and sins of the tongue. The dramatis personae surrounding the figure of Meed, in particular her family structure, call attention to this alignment with guile. Though Langland places a broad spectrum of legal terms personified as clerks and bureaucrats around Meed, he stresses that she is "moost pryuee" with those particularly associated with corruption like simony and civil rather than criminal law (B. 2. 63–64). Indeed, her affiliation with these villains is increasingly close over the course of Langland's revisions, as they go from witnesses to her wedding in A and B to kinsmen who conspire with Meed's father Favel to scheme a union between Meed and False in C. Meed's lineage from Favel—a term Langland drew from the French *favele* or "fable," which would come to mean "flattery" and "guile"—begins to associate her with sins of the tongue and

44. Meed is thus akin to those itinerant preachers who proliferated in the wake of the Black Death. Many church authorities perceived such figures to be insufficiently trained in Latin or correct models of biblical interpretation, a condition that rendered them spiritual frauds for taking money indiscriminately without sufficient spiritual repayment. As such, these preachers were rhetorically constructed by church authorities as fraudsters or spiritual confidence men. Their voices, which were perceived to lack the spiritual substance brought by a deep and correct knowledge of scripture, were often associated with noise. Indeed, in "Why Women Can't Read," Copeland shows how this implicit hermeneutic law, which aligned the reading practices of the laity—specifically women—with attention to the superficial, material qualities of a text in place of the more abstract "truth" at its core, would come to be influential in the formation of explicit laws outlining the conditions for prosecuting the Wycliffite or "lollard" heresy. For more on the ways that the medieval church in England controlled such lay behavior by instituting preaching licenses and identified and constructed categories of religious deviance through such legislation, see Ian Forrest, *The Detection of Heresy in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), especially 60–68 and 115–22.

voice. This affiliation is amplified when Meed is coupled with the guileful personification of Favel's choice. If he marries Meed, Favel's marriage charter offers False

> To be princes in Pride, and pouerte to despise,
> To bakbite and to bosten and bere fals witnesse,
> To scorne and to scolde and sclaundre to make,
> Vnbuxome and bolde to breke þe ten hestes.
> And þe erldom of Enuye and [Ire] togideres
> Wiþ þe chastilet of cheste and chaterynge out of reson.
>
> (B. 2. 80–85)

As several scholars have noted, the document comments satirically on the corrupt distribution of meed by parodying the vast landholdings given to the Black Prince, son of King Edward III, at his investiture in 1362.[45] More pointedly they tie such corruption to deceptive speech acts, underscoring a causal relationship between Meed's family wealth and idle talk: a voice that is all sound and no substance as it "chater[s] out of reson."[46] For Langland, Meed's associations with material wealth and reward correspond with a tendency to privilege the material and sensual aspects of language, resulting in superficial reading and speech.

Clerical Violence and the Wife's Jingle-Jangle

Like Meed, Chaucer's Wife of Bath reads "lyk a lady" according to the standards of male clerical literacy, attending to the letter of religious authorities, but missing the spirit or intention of their words in order to justify her own desires. For Chaucer, the Wife's deafness is a figurative means of signaling her attention to superficial sounds over doctrinal truth, resulting in a voice apparently empty of substance. In a moment of marital and pedagogical violence that leads to the Wife's hearing impairment, the Wife recalls:

> By God, he [Jankyn] smoot me ones on the lyst,
> For that I rent out of his book a leef,

45. See Galloway, *Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman*, 259.

46. Langland reinforces this relationship in his revisions of the C text as he changes the list of moral deficiencies that will result from Meed's marriage to emphasize idle speech. While in the B text, whomever marries Meed will spend fasting days frequenting taverns and wallowing "as burgh swyn" (B. 2. 98), in the C text, they will while away the time "With spiserye, speke ydelnesse, in vayne speche and spene" (C. 2. 104).

That of the strook myn ere wax al deef.
Stibourn I was as is a leonesse,
And of my tonge a verray jangleresse.
(III. 634–38)

The Wife refuses to listen to Jankyn's lectures and demonstrates her disavowal of textual authority by ripping a page from her husband's book. In return, she is punished with a deafening blow. There is a strange temporality to this: deafness is a punishment for deafness. I argue that this gesture must be read in conjunction with the many ways that the Wife's body is marked with signs of her character: the gap in her teeth, which signals her luxurious nature; her "prente" of Venus (III. 604) and "mark" of Mars (III. 619). By deafening her as punishment for her mislistening, Jankyn makes manifest in her body the Wife's spiritual disability, forcing a correlation between internal spiritual state and external sign. With this gesture, Chaucer calls attention to the violent effects of this clerical ideal of perfect transparency, when it is imposed upon others. The Wife's response to this violence, as this passage makes clear, avows her identity as a noisemaker—a "jangleresse"—in a way that seems to engage in antifeminist stereotypes, but that ultimately insists upon the pleasures of the body as a crucial form of lay knowledge by experience.

As we have seen in Walter Map, the carnality associated with femininity was often emphasized by figuring feminine voices as empty sound. Chaucer draws from such depictions in his characterization of the Wife's voice. In the passage above, the Wife's self-comparison to a "leonesse" implies that her perceptive and vocal impairments are tied to carnal or bestial qualities. Like Zeus mooing after Europa or the braying and bleating peasants in Gower's account of the Peasant's Revolt, the Wife's voice seems to stem from passion and self-interested desires. With its feline metaphor, this episode asks to be read in conjunction with a similar moment in the Wife's Prologue, in which she recalls her husband's condemnation of her love of ostentatious fine attire:

Thou seydest this, that I was lyk a cat:
For whoso wolde senge a cattes skyn,
Thanne wolde the cat wel dwellen in his in;
And if the cattes skyn be slyk and gay,
She wol not dwelle in house half a day,
But forth she wole, er any day be dawed,
To shewe her skin and goon a-caterwawed.
(III. 348–54)

The likeness of the Wife to a cat on the prowl again links her sexuality to her voice as it suggests that she shows her skin and goes caterwauling. Like the "gaye scarlet gytes" (III. 559) that she revels in showing, the Wife's loud voice is a kind of ostentatious display. Indeed, the Wife seems to have heard this point of view, but not to have internalized its critique when she says of her own marital complaints, "For as an hors I koude byte and whyne" (III. 386). The Wife's own self-comparison to a punchy horse correlates the wildness of her sexuality with the wildness of her speech, emphasizing the irrepressibly corporeal nature of her voice.

Given this emphasis on the Wife's voice as empty sound, it is no surprise that she should be associated with the verb *janglen*, a verb that in Middle English covered a range of empty or idle talk. I suggest that with his depiction of the Wife of Bath, Chaucer was instrumental in the word's shift from denoting idle talk to its later sense as noise. The first attested usage of the verb "jangle" applying to the sound of bells, or more broadly "a harsh or discordant sound," does not occur until the late fifteenth century, nearly one hundred years after Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales*.[47] Yet Chaucer's characterization of the Wife of Bath as a "jangleresse" marks a moment when the more common Middle English verb *janglen* was shifting from its etymological associations with the French *jangler* (a verb for idle talking that chimes with the homophonic French noun *jonglour*, a minstrel or poet) and beginning to acquire its more contemporary noisemaking sense. In Chaucer's work, this shift was accomplished, in part, through the influence of another verb in Middle English: *ginglen* or "jingle"—a phonic sibling, though apparently unrelated etymologically to *janglen*.[48] The lexical connection between jingling and the Wife's particular mode of jangling becomes stronger as we recall a detail from the Monk's portrait in the General Prologue:

> And whan he rood, men myghte his brydel heere
> Gynglen in a whistlynge wynd als cleere
> And eek as loude as dooth the chapel belle
> Ther as this lord was kepere of the celle.
>
> (I. 169–72)

Here, Chaucer-the-pilgrim makes an invidious distinction between the jingling of the Monk's bridle and the sound of the chapel where the Monk "was kepere of the celle." In the context of the Monk's overall portrait,

47. See *OED*, s.v. "jangle" v.
48. See *OED*, s.v. "jingle" v.

which stresses his love of hunting or "venerie" (I. 166) and his stable full of horses, this comparison between his bridle and the bell not only of *a* chapel, but of *his* chapel calls attention to the out-of-place courtliness of his behavior, emphasizing his misplaced attention to worldly rather than spiritual pursuits.

The Monk's "jingling," like the Wife's "jangling," links their characters with the life of the body rather than the mind and spirit; the physical world rather than the metaphysical. As we have seen, this is the Wife's domain. The reduplicative impulse evident in the chime of "jingle" and "jangle" would become a well-trod pathway for the creation of new idioms in early modern English as authors invented phrases like "mishmash," "mingle-mangle," "bibble-babble," and more as a contemptuous and parodic means of denoting language that was artificial or otherwise "empty."[49]

Chaucer's characterization of the Wife's deafness and noisemaking were influenced by an antifeminist tradition that considered feminine corporeality—whether or not it was located in a body that was biologically female—to be an impediment to learning and speaking spiritual doctrine. Yet *The Canterbury Tales* does not identify straightforwardly with this tradition. In other words, while my argument may be aligned to the letter with Robertson's notion that the Wife exhibits a "spiritual deafness," it is somewhat different in spirit. The Wife's "jangling," with its connotations of fictionality, pleasure, and noise, disrupts clerical authority and asserts a lay epistemology grounded in bodily experience.

The Wife's noisemaking emerges as a lay antidote to clerical authority in the end link to The Man of Law's Tale, which precedes the Wife's Prologue in most modern editorial editions of *The Canterbury Tales*. The scene initially begins with deference to the clergy. Harry Baily, the host of the Canterbury pilgrims, invites the Parson to speak following The Man of Law's Tale of Constance, who is so obedient to authority that she endures being set adrift in a rudderless boat. When the Parson objects to the Host's mild oath, however, he undertakes an about-face in his attitudes toward this conventional mode of clerical authority, joking with mild menace, "O Jankin, be ye there? / I smelle a Lollere in the wynd" (II. 1172–73). Though some scholars have suggested that the Host is calling the Parson a Wycliffite in this passage, perhaps in reference to Wycliffite proscriptions against swearing, my reading is in line with those who propose that the Host is more broadly opposed to

49. See Jenny C. Mann, *Outlaw Rhetoric: Figuring Vernacular Eloquence in Shakespeare's England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 171–200.

the sanctimonious piety of a learned and Latinate religious authority.[50] The Host employs the scornful nickname "Jankin," a diminutive of "Sir John" that was used widely as a derisive name for a priest during the period.[51] More pointedly, he sarcastically embraces the Parson's preachiness:

> "Now! Goode men," quod oure Hoste, "herkneth me;
> Abydeth, for Goddes digne passioun,
> For we schal han a predicacioun;
> This Lollere heer wil prechen us somewhat."
>
> (II. 1174–77)

Here the Host persists in calling the Parson by the derisive term "lollere" and refers to his would-be sermon by the Latinate term "predicacioun." Both details underscore the Host's irony in calling on the Parson to preach. The Host's choice to lead with this aureate term, and then to follow with its English translation, "prechen," suggests his alignment of clerical authority with Latinate learning and highfalutin terminology. The Host invokes the word *lollare*, then, as a way of dismissing the self-righteous morality of a clerical speaker. In other words, like many of the authors of religious polemic during Chaucer's time, he seeks to undermine the Parson's authority by calling him a name associated with radical thinkers, the lollards, who interrogated religious authority. Accusations of noisemaking were leveled from Wycliffites and anti-Wycliffites alike as a means of dismissing the so-called empty argumentation of the opposing side. Here, Harry Baily uses the term "lollare" in a way that overlaps with Langland's use when he dismisses the duplicitous artificiality of the *lollares*' performances.

In response to Harry Baily's sarcastic invitation to the Parson, another pilgrim interrupts in protest, tone deaf, we might say, to the Host's irony. This tone-deafness is perhaps our first clue to a possible wifely identity for this speaker. Though the interrupting pilgrim's name varies in different manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*, scholars have offered convincing evidence

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50. Despite pointing out that objections to swearing were widespread, even among orthodox clergy, the editors of the *Riverside Chaucer* nevertheless frame this section in terms of the Host's "assum[ption] that the Parson's objection to swearing indicates he is a Lollard." See *Riverside Chaucer*, 863, n. 1171. On "lollards" and swearing, see Henry G. Russell, "Lollard Opposition to Oaths by Creatures," *American Historical Review* 51 (1946): 668–84.

51. *MED*, s.v. "Jon," https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary. In the Nun's Priest's Prologue, the Host addresses him derisively as "Sir John" (VII. 2810). For further discussion of this exchange in terms of conflict between *latinitas* and vernacularity, see Derreck Pitard, "Sowing Difficulty: The Parson's Tale, Vernacular Commentary, and the Nature of Christian Dissent," *SAC* 26 (2004): 300–305.

that this pilgrim was the Wife of Bath at some point in the course of Chaucer's composition and revision of the poem.[52] I offer further support for this identification based on thematic and textual overlap in the speech of this pilgrim, whom I will here call the Wife of Bath.

Following the Host's invitation, the Wife roundly refutes the Parson and offers an impromptu manifesto on lay and vernacular voices and the modes of understanding that they produce:

> "Nay, by my fader soule that schal he nat [speak]!"
> Seyde the [Wife], "Heer schal he nat preche;
> He schal no gospel glosen here ne teche.
> We leven alle in the grete God," quod [s]he;
> "He wolde sowen som difficulte,
> Or springen cokkel in oure clene corn.
> And therefore, Hoost, I warne thee biforn,
> My joly body schal a tale telle,
> And I schal clynken you so mery a belle,
> That I schal waken al this compaignie.
> But it schal not ben of philosophie,
> Ne phislyas, ne termes queinte of lawe.
> Ther is but litel Latyn in my mawe!"
>
> (II. 1178–90)

Here, the reference to "cokkel in oure clene corn" alludes to Latinate orthodox tendencies to denounce *lolia*: the tares, weeds, or "cokkel" polluting the purity of orthodox faith. It is clear that the speaker seems at first to talk the talk of orthodoxy and, with it, conventional models of power that granted ultimate earthly authority to clerics and other male authority figures.[53]

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52. Joseph Dane, "The Wife of Bath's Shipman's Tale and the Invention of Chaucerian Fabliaux," *MLR* 99, no. 2 (2004): 287–300. The *Riverside Chaucer* follows the ordering of fragments offered by the *Tales*'s first modern editor, Thomas Tyrwhitt, who based his editorial decisions on the order of the tales in the Ellesmere manuscript. In the nineteenth century, several decades after Tyrwhitt's eighteenth-century edition, Henry Bradshaw drew upon his work to posit a slight variation in the order of *Tales*: the Shipman's Prologue and Tale were placed after The Man of Law's Tale, while the Wife of Bath's Prologue followed The Pardoner's Tale later in the narrative. While Tyrwhitt's fragments are the basis of the *Riverside Chaucer*, what is now known as the "Bradshaw shift" was embraced by the Chaucer Society and by editors like Skeat. See Larry D. Benson, introduction to Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, in *Riverside Chaucer*, 5. While it is not my intention to argue definitively for an ordering of *The Canterbury Tales*, I do suggest that the usurping speaker's interest in noise, and in using it to undermining clerical authority, adds further evidence that the lines were assigned to the Wife of Bath at some point.

53. This is Cole's reading in *Literature and Heresy*, 77–79.

Yet what follows from this apparent complacency is a radical reversal that rejects the voice and discourse of learned Latinate authority and asserts the significance of a very different mode of speaking and listening. The Wife's rejection of "phislyas," a word unattested elsewhere that was thought to be a garbled form of "physic," the discipline of medicine, offers a concise example of these dual impulses. While it is possible to read the Wife's use of this term as mocking evidence of her limited education, I suggest that we can read the joke extending in the other direction.[54] In the context of this section's virulent rejection of clerical authority and conventional literacy, *phislyas* reads like a word invented to poke fun of the highfalutin and impenetrable terminology of the educated classes. Here, the Wife rejects the voice and discourse of learned Latinate authority and asserts the significance of a very different kind of voice—one that emerges from a "joly body." This line's assonantal lilt—"My joly body schal a tale telle"—invites a kind of listening for sounds over sense; a voice that resounds from a jolly body also appeals to a jolly body. In this moment, the Wife takes pleasure in the sound of her own voice—and invites others to do so as well.

It is significant that the Wife frames this emphatically physical voice, which disrupts an established social order and hierarchy, in terms of noise. By allowing her "joly body" to tell a tale, the Wife's voice will "clyn[k] . . . so mery a belle," waking the company of pilgrims in the process. Bells were intimately associated with the city of Canterbury and connected to the orthodox practice of pilgrimage, as in the testimony of the accused Wycliffite William Thorpe, who rejected the "gingelynge of [the] Cantirbirie bellis," among other sights and sounds of pilgrimage—an example, like the jingling of the Monk's bridle, that links the noise of bells to superficial sensory perception and pleasure.[55] Thorpe's denunciation of the parishioners who attended to the "sacring belle" as a false outward sign of devotion reminds us that among many religious reformers, bells were understood as a sensory distraction (one of many provided by the Catholic Church) from the cultivation of true spiritual attention to God.[56]

The metaphor of the bell's noise was also often used to dismiss speech that was deemed empty or worthless. In Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, for example, the confessor suggests that the tongue of a prideful person "clappeth as

54. The view that this word mocks the illiteracy of the speaker was first described by R. C. Goffin in "Notes on Chaucer," *MLR* 18, no. 3 (1923): 335–37. It has since been adopted widely among Chaucer's editors. See *Riverside Chaucer*, 863, n. 1189.

55. Hudson, *Two Wycliffite Texts*, 64.

56. Hudson, *Two Wycliffite Texts*, 52.

a bell," associating the noise of a bell with the sin of boasting.[57] Chaucer evokes this phrase at the close of The Monk's Tale, when the Host swears "Ye . . . by Seint Poules belle! / Ye seye right sooth; this Monk he clappeth lowde" (VII. 2780–81). With this comparison, the Host condemns the Monk for the turgid didacticism of his story of relentless tragedy. He goes on to explain that the Monk's tale amounts to idle talk in its inability to balance pleasure or "game" (VII. 2791) with moral sentence:

> Sire Monk, namoore of this, so God yow blesse!
> Youre tale anoyeth al this compaignye.
> Swich talkyn is nat worth a boterflye,
> For therinne is ther no desport ne game.
> Wherfore, sire Monk, daun Piers by youre name,
> I pray yow hertely telle us somwhat ells;
> For sikerly, nere clynkyng of youre belles
> That on youre bridel hange on every syde,
> By hevene kyng that for us alle dyde,
> I sholde er this han fallen doun for sleep,
> Although the slough had never been so deep;
> Thanne hadde your tale al be toold in veyn.
>
> (VII. 2788–99)

As in the previous passage, when the Wife vows to awaken the entire company with the voice of her jolly body, the clinking of the Monk's bridle bells are the only things rousing the company of pilgrims from the stupor induced by his tale. Ironically and perhaps counterintuitively, in the space of a few lines the noise of bells denotes both the monotonous droning quality of The Monk's Tale and the antidote to such dull moralizing: the loud noise that will again rouse the pilgrims' interest and attention.

Experiential Knowledge and the "Bath of Blisse"

In this context, the Wife's partial deafness and jangling voice are part of a larger impulse to consider seriously lay understanding and expression. The Wife famously begins her Prologue by contrasting her own lay

57. John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Russell A. Peck (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006), 1:127. This example occurs in the Confessor's gloss of the "Tale of Narcissus" in book 1, l. 2391.

knowledge-by-experience with more dominant and authoritative forms of clerical *latinitas*, declaring,

> Experience though noon auctoritee
> Were in this world, is right ynogh for me
> To speke of wo that is in mariage.
>
> (III. 1–3)

As we have seen, through the first section of her Prologue, she draws from textual authorities but manipulates their words to her own agenda. The Wife's basic point is that as a woman married five times since the age of twelve, her practical experience offers her at least as much authority on the subject as the never-married male religious and clerics, responsible for the moral discourse to which she has been forced to conform. As she summarizes,

> Diverse scoles maken parfyt clerkes,
> And diverse practyk in many sondry werkes
> Maketh the workman parfyt sekirly.
>
> (III. 44c–e)

Chaucer-the-pilgrim emphasizes this crucial element of the Wife's character in his portrait in the General Prologue. While the Wife's deafness is the first bit of defining information we learn, her knowledge and technical skill in textile craft is the second. Again, this knowledge is framed in terms of practice and experience as the narrator recounts: "Of clooth-makyng she hadde swich an haunt / She passed hem of Ypres and of Gaunt" (I. 447–48). The Wife's professional expertise is not grounded in the knowledge of established textual authorities, but instead based in "haunt[s]"—the habit or practice of something based on repeated returns to the action. Such a foundation distinguishes the Wife's specialized knowledge, based in labor and habit, from the clerical standards based in intellectual pursuit.

Indeed, the Wife's muscle memory extends beyond her skill in weaving into her knack for the game of love, a form of expertise framed throughout her Prologue as a particularly feminine means of knowledge. The closing point of the Wife's portrait in the General Prologue affirms that "Of remedies of love she knew per chaunce, / For she koude of that art the olde daunce" (I. 475–76). These lines equate the game of love with a "daunce"—one that is undertaken not systematically but "per chaunce," through bodily experience. This domain of experiential knowledge is, moreover, the domain of women. Recounting her flirtatious pursuit of her fifth husband, the Wife notes, "My dame taughte me that soutiltee" (III. 576). As scholars

like Karma Lochrie have highlighted, the transmission of this feminine knowledge was often associated with gossip and other idle talk.[58] The Wife sets the intimate exchange of secrets among women in explicit contrast with masculine religious authority as she recalls of her "gossib" (III. 529), Alisoun: "She knew myn herte, and eek my privitee, / Bet than oure parisshe preest, so moot I thee!" (III. 531–32). She goes on to outline the transmission of "conseil" from Wife to gossib, to niece, and to "another worthy wyf" (III. 533–38). These networks of feminine knowledge extend to other nonmale figures as well. The Pardoner, whose masculinity is undermined when he is famously construed in the General Prologue as "a geldyng or a mare" (I. 691), interrupts the Wife's Prologue in his enthusiasm that she "teche us yonge men of youre praktike" (III. 187).[59] The Wife's allusions to the knowledge of "feminine" arts, passed down by her dame and disseminated among female—and feminine—neighbors and relatives, works to outline a larger network of orally transmitted women's knowledge. Such feminine knowledge is circulated in private and hidden in plain sight as its practitioners use language and performance in a way that resists a dogmatic insistence on singular truth and, as her Tale shows, embraces the physicality and multiplicity of feminine voices.

As we have seen, in her Prologue, the Wife repeatedly asserts the authority of bodily experience by embracing a material relationship to language and texts. In telling her Tale, she gives voice to an experiential knowledge that allows polyvocality and multivalence to operate as alternatives to authority. A tension between authoritative and lay forms of knowledge is evident from the very beginning of her tale:

> In th' olde dayes of the Kyng Arthour,
> Of which that Britons speken greet honour,
> Al was this land fulfild of fayerye.
> The elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye,
> Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede.
> This was the olde opinion, as I rede;
> I speke of many hundred yeres ago.
> But now kan no man se none elves mo,
> For now the grete charitee and prayeres
> Of lymytoures and other holy freres,

58. Lochrie, *Covert Operations*, 56–92.

59. For more on the Pardoner as a queer figure with affinities to the Wife, see Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 156–84, and Minnis, *Fallible Authors*, 98–169.

That serchen every lond and every streem,
As thikke as motes in the sonne-beem,
Blessynge halles, chambres, kichenes, boures,
Citees, burghes, castels, hye toures,
Thropes, bernes, shipnes, dayeryes—
This maketh that ther ben no fayeryes.
(III. 857–72)

The Wife complains about "lymytoures," a term for mendicant friars whose course was confined to specific territories. The Wife figures such limitation, not only as an imposition of geographical boundaries by the church, but also as a kind of spiritual and perhaps semantic constraint: a disenchantment that eliminates the strangeness and portentous wonder of fairy habits and habitats with blessings that fix their meaning solely in relation to the Christian God.

This discussion of clerical limitation or circumscription of meaning anticipates the narrative structure of the tale: after a young knight has raped a young woman, he is spared at the hands of the queen on the condition that he find the answer to her question of "what thing is it that women moost desiren" (III. 905). The Wife's treatment of rape has been the subject of much critical debate, which is adjacent but not central to my discussion of the Wife's voice.[60] Here I am interested instead in how The Wife's Tale, as in her Prologue, sets acts of physical violence on women's bodies in juxtaposition with a kind of epistemological violence against feminine ways of knowing. The focal act of gendered violence in the Wife's Prologue—her deafening at the hands of her fifth husband—makes literal the cognitive and emotional violence of Jankyn's dogmatic imposition of a clerical epistemology that insists on "correct" and "incorrect" ways of knowing. The Wife's Tale responds in kind by using an act of sexual violence against a woman to explore an alternative to the dogmatic ways of thinking it interrogates in the Prologue.

The structure of The Wife's Tale implies a binary logic of reciprocal justice. To escape being punished by death, the knight must find the correct single answer to a simple question: what do women want. Scholars have tended to take for granted that the tale's answer to this question is "sovereignty." Yet in my reading, the tale resists such a clear or straightforward response. The

60. For a fuller treatment of rape in Chaucer's Wife of Bath's Tale, which focuses on the rhetorical complexities and failures of language in naming rape, see, for example, Suzanne Edwards, "The Rhetoric of Rape and the Politics of Gender in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* and the *1382 Statute of Rapes*," *Exemplaria* 23, no. 1 (2011): 3–26.

answer to the tale's focal question is both vocalized and destabilized in ways that accentuate how the Wife skillfully maintains her own lay epistemology. The tale offers answers to its focal question at three key points: first, in the clamor of female opinion the knight encounters on his quest; next in the loathly lady's whispered advice as he concludes his allotted time; and finally, not in a vocalized answer, but in the experience of "blisse" offered by the knight's marriage to the loathly lady.

The Wife's first attempt to represent the answer to the tale's focal question occurs as the knight takes in the manifold opinions on the matter among the women he encounters. Their voices, coupled with that of the Wife herself, come together in a chorus of chatter that proves as elusive and resistant to understanding as any silence:

> Somme seyde women loven best richesse,
> Somme seyde honour, somme seyde jolynesse;
> Somme rich aray, some seyden lust abedde,
> And oftetyme to be widwe and wedde.
> Somme seyde that oure hertes been most esed
> Whan that we been yflatered and yplesed.
> He gooth ful ny the sothe, I wol nat lye.
> A man shal win us best with flaterye,
> And with attendance and with bisynesse
> Been we ylymed, bothe moore and lesse.
> And somme seyen that we loven best
> For to be free and do right as us lest,
> And that no man repreve us of oure vice,
> But seye that we be wise and no thing nyce.
> . . . . . .
> And some seyn that greet delit han we
> For to been holden stable, and eek secree,
> And in o purpose steadfastly to dwelle,
> And nat biwreye thyng that men us telle.
>
> (III. 925–38, 945–48)

In these answers to the knight's question we see the persistence of the Wife's antifeminist tropes and ideas. Much of what women want, according to this list, is the finer things in life like money and "rich aray." Or, in keeping with a similar impulse toward sensuality and pleasure, they want flattery or "lust abedde." Tellingly, however, a few more sanctioned desires make their way onto the list, such as "honour" and "steadfast[ness]." At the

same time that the list of women's desires reinforces antifeminist tropes about women's caprice and emotionality, this list also raises the possibility that such polyvalence of opinion is part of the point of the knight's quest. At this moment in The Wife's Tale, the question's resistance to a singular answer is an answer in itself.

The ending of The Wife's Tale would seem to contradict this insistence on multiplicity. At this point, the magical old crone or "loathly lady," whom scholars have read as a stand-in for the Wife, seems to complete the knight's quest by giving him an answer and stabilizing "moral": women desire sovereignty. But it is important to note that we never hear the old woman offer this answer. Her direct response to the question is hidden to readers as she turns to the knight and "rowne[s] . . . a pistel in his ere" (III. 1021). The Middle English verb *rounen*—often used interchangeably with *janglen* to refer to idle talk—is etymologically related to the noun *rún* meaning, among other things "whisper," "mystery," and "secret." It also refers to the inscribed characters that comprised the earliest Germanic alphabet, which was largely unknown even to literate Anglo-Saxons and thus reinforces the covert and unanswerable nature of the question.[61] Indeed, the answer to the question, "sovereignty," is only articulated "with manly voys" (III. 1036) as the knight reports it to the court upon his return. In other words, at this moment near the end of the tale, the answer to the tale's focal question is still coming from the knight's own perspective. The Wife has made readers deaf to her own answer to the question, and the lesson of her tale remains obscured.

At the end of her tale, the knight finally acquiesces and cedes "governance" (III. 1231) to the loathly lady, persuaded by her argument. In response, the old woman declares that she will be both fair and "trewe" (III. 1243). Feminist scholars have consistently read this ending as an extension of the text's misogyny. In this view, the loathly lady's transformation into a beautiful young bride who "obey[s] hym [the knight] in every thyng" (III. 1255) signals the Wife's return to privileging male desire over her own. But I argue that the old woman—and the Wife herself—engages in a more complex masquerade. She appears to defer authority to her male counterparts, but she maintains a measure of control over her own body and voice. In a dramatic final gesture, the old woman bids him "Cast up the curtyn, looke how that it is" (III. 1250). Here, the image of "casting up the curtain"

61. Joseph Bosworth and N. Northcote Toller, eds., *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), s.v. "rún," http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/026037.

is theatrical, stressing that the old woman is framing herself anew with language and gesture. In addition to acting as a screen to conceal an object, curtains were also used to set off objects imbued with a mysterious authority, such as altars.[62] Ultimately, the old woman's transformation reinforces her mastery over the way others perceive her.

And with these words, the voice of the old woman vanishes from the tale, which ends with a shift to the perspective of the knight whose heart is "bathed in a bath of blisse" (III. 1253) as he embraces his beautiful and true bride. At first consideration, this phrase seems to be a platitude about the knight's marital happiness, underscoring the Wife's emphasis on the knight's perspective and desires. Here I offer an alternate perspective: this apparently bland banality masks the Wife's continued embrace of the authority of physical experience and expression. In making this claim, I am interested in the phrase "bathed in a bath of blisse" both for its semantic resonances and for its sounds.

Historically speaking, public baths or brothels—often called "stewes" in Middle English—were a common part of London city life, one that Chaucer was undoubtedly aware of.[63] With its connotations of joy, happiness, and pleasure, the knight's "bath of blisse" evokes this illicit mode of bathing.[64] The Middle English word "bliss," moreover, carried a broader semantic range than it does in Modern English, encompassing "the *expression* of joyful feeling, rejoicing, merrymaking, etc." according to the *MED*.[65] In The Knight's Tale, Palamon weds Emelye "with al blisse and melodye" (I. 3097). For Langland's Dreamer, the "blisse of the briddes" (A. 9. 58; B. 8. 64) arrests his journey and sends him to sleep on more than one occasion. As the knight stews in his "bath of blisse" he is enveloped in a form of ecstatic sensation tied implicitly to joyous noise.

The significance of these resonances is complex. The phrase evokes a striking moment from Augustine's *Confessions*, which describes the saint's entrance to Carthage where "a cauldron of unholy loves crackled around

62. *MED*, s.v. "curtin(e)," https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary.

63. See Henry Ansgar Kelly, "Bishop, Prioress, and Bawd in the Stews of Southwark," *Speculum* 75, no. 2 (2000): 351–52.

64. Here I am building on ideas in David Wallace's "Chaucerian Charisma, or What C. S. Lewis Really Did," presented at the New Chaucer Society Conference of 2016. Wallace offered an interpretation of C. S. Lewis's essay "What Chaucer Really Did to *Il Filostrato*" that highlighted the misogyny and homophobia in Lewis's treatment of Chaucer's adaptation with a focus on the idea of the "boggy marsh" or grotesque pleasure cauldron as a locus of dangerous feminine power. I thank David Wallace for generously discussing and sharing a copy of this paper with me after his presentation.

65. *MED*, s.v. "blis(se)," https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary (emphasis added).

[him] (*circumstrepebant*)," or in T. S. Eliot's translation "sang all about [his] ears."[66] Like the knight, Augustine is here swathed in the pleasures of sound. As we have seen, Augustine's entrance to Carthage was often interpreted in terms of Aeneas's dalliance with Dido as a state of juvenile investment in pleasure before the development of spiritual maturity. In this vein, critics might read this as further evidence of the Wife's link to dangerous feminine seduction and distraction from spiritual truth.

Yet here it is important to take into account the sounds of the Wife's phrase, where alliteration and assonance begin to turn the Wife's voice into a babble of sound: *"ba*thed in a *ba*th of *bl*isse." The aural texture of the line combines with the dual connotations of "bliss" as both euphoric sensation and expression. The knight's "bath of blisse" connects such experience to the Wife herself by incorporating her own provenance—and part of her name—into the line's alliteration, adding up to an authorial signature that ties the Wife's authority to sensory experience. In sum, the Wife's voice disrupts the tale's binary logic—of crime and punishment, question and answer—by playing with the sounds of language and by inviting her audience to perceive her voice as noise. The voice of the Siren embraces the knight and, in turn, Chaucer shows how it is possible to embrace the voice of the Siren.

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66. Augustine, *Confessions*, 1:98; T. S. Eliot, *The Annotated Waste Land: With T. S. Eliot's Contemporary Prose*, ed. J. H. Elliott and Lawrence S. Rainey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 73, n. 307.

Epilogue
Echoic Afterlives

> Damn that fellow's noise in the street. Self which it itself was ineluctably preconditioned to become. *Ecco*!
>
> —James Joyce, *Ulysses*, "Circe" (412)
>
> Hark! Our friend noise in the street.
>
> —James Joyce, *Ulysses*, "Circe" (468)

This book has argued that an attunement to extrasemantic experiences of language—understood broadly in terms of noise—was tied to the lay epistemologies and literacies that effloresced in myriad forms in late medieval England. Such impulses to experience and express language as noise were a means of cultivating direct access to knowledge, without the mediation of religious authorities, through affective and sensory experience. This was not, however, the only shape for this reformist inclination. The Wycliffite heresy is perhaps the best-known example of such lay urges; or the one most acknowledged by scholars as a movement in its own right. As chapter 3 highlighted, the ideas of Wyclif and his followers overlapped in some but not all ways with the avenues of thought, feeling, and sensation I have traced here. Wyclif and his followers are known for their desire to limit clerical authority by encouraging a deep personal relationship to the biblical word in a way that scholars have suggested was a precursor to the Reformation.[1] This impulse was behind their programs for

1. Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). Since Hudson's influential study, scholars have debated the extent to which Wycliffite thought and practice aligned with that of the Reformation.

education and vernacular translation (among other agendas).[2] Yet the epistemologies of noise that I trace in this book were not aligned exactly with the ideals and practices of the Wycliffites. Indeed, though they share a desire to empower the laity and bypass clerical authority, the world of echo I examine emphasized the material qualities of the voice in opposition to the Wycliffite ideal of bodily transcendence. In doing so, it reasserted a central paradox of Catholicism centered on the incarnation: the body as a source of sin and error, but also of salvation.

In the remainder of this epilogue I will trace how the contested interplay of sound and sense echoes through Anglo-Irish poetics through several centuries by calling attention to a few evocative examples, lingering on the high-modernist writing of James Joyce. In doing so I will by necessity be suggestive rather than exhaustive. It is my hope that these gestures may lead to further work bridging the scholarly and intellectual gaps between the study of the Middle Ages and modernity.

Early Modern England saw a rising concern with plain speech, which Protestant thinkers often contrasted with the "magical" incantations of Catholicism or the "effeminate" poetry of the court. The Weird Sisters of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* speak in an arcane rhyming singsong (a throwback, though probably not intentional, to Chaucer's early dream visions). Such incantatory speech conveys their devilish carnality in contrast to the heroic pentameter of figures like the future king, Malcolm.

Similarly, the literary criticism of the early seventeenth century also conveys a preference for a more spare and vital mode of writing that effectively conveys a point of view. Ben Jonson's posthumous work *Timber or Discoveries Made Upon Men and Matter*, for example, denounces those who "labor only to ostentation; and are ever more busy about the colors and surface of a work than in the matter and foundation." According to Jonson, there are two such types who place greater focus on the surface sounds or "colors" of language. The first are those who affect a "rough and broken" style that they consider "more strong and manly" in its tendency to "str[i]ke the ear with a kind of unevenness." The second are "Women's poets," who "have no composition at all; but a kind of tuning and riming fall in what they write." Such poetry, Jonson maintains, "runs and slides and only makes a sound."[3]

2. Hudson's *Premature Reformation* is still a classic for background on the Wycliffites and their programs for reform. See also Ian Christopher Levy, ed., *A Companion to John Wyclif: Late Medieval Theologian* (Leiden: Brill, 2006) and Lahey, *John Wyclif*.

3. Ben Jonson, *Timber or Discoveries Made Upon Men and Matter*, ed. Felix E. Schelling (Boston: Gin and Company, 1892), 24–26.

Good poetry strikes a mean, according to Jonson. "Effeminate" writing—writing by and for women—is overly soft to the senses, sliding into the ear without grounding in mental communication, while "harsh" writing that aims excessively to counteract such tendencies is equally foolish and unnatural. "The true artificer," Jonson concludes, "will not run away from Nature as he were afraid of her, or depart from life and the likeness of truth, but speak to the capacity of his hearers."[4] With his emphasis on moderation and mindfulness of audience, Jonson reinforces the notion that the physical experience and pleasure of sounds should be secondary and auxiliary to the communication of meaning as an author's utmost goal. Decades later, in his 1674 second edition of *Paradise Lost*, John Milton would advance unrhymed pentameter or blank verse as a classical and heroic meter more fit for his lofty subject matter than the "jingling sound of like endings" or the "noise" of rhyme.[5] Recent scholarship has called attention to Milton's role in advancing blank verse as the paradigmatic meter of "freethinking" and with it modernity, a notion adopted and extended by the Romantics.[6]

The tension between sounds and meaning effervesced in Victorian debates around prosody in the nineteenth century as British authors began to engage with the ways that certain sounds, often identified as "rough" or primitive in some fashion, offered a more authentic mode of poetic communication. Such points of view were often tied to the author's medievalism. Writing primarily in the first half of the nineteenth century, the poet Robert Browning explored the issue of ineffability in a secular context through the point of view of the thirteenth-century Italian troubadour Sordello, who wonders how well language can convey individual experience and thought. Sordello ultimately aims to "hamme[r] out" a "rude armor" with which to clothe his own experience.[7] As Matthew Campbell points out, the rude and imperfect quality of this armor is an indication that it does not fit; the word does not adequately convey or "clothe" the thought.[8]

Yet in later poetry, Browning goes on to suggest that such roughness, expressed through the soundplay and patterning in the poems of "On Pacchiarotto," is precisely the point of poetry. In one such poem, Browning

4. Jonson, *Timber*, 26–27.

5. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (London: Longman, 1998), 55.

6. Henry Weinfield, *The Blank-Verse Tradition from Milton to Stevens: Freethinking and the Crisis of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

7. Robert Browning, *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning*, ed. Ian Jack and Margaret Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 2:575–79.

8. Matthew Campbell, "Rhyme," in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry*, ed. Matthew Bevis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 82.

alludes to his critics' accusations that he has "no ear" with verse that revels in its own singsong noise:

> And, what with your rattling and tinkling,
> Who knows but you give me an inkling
> How music sounds, thanks to the jangle
> Of regular drum and triangle?
> Whereby, tap-tap, chink-chink, 'tis proven
> I break rule as bad as Beethoven
> That chord now—a groan or a grunt is't?
> Schuman's self was no worse contrapuntist.
> No ear! Or if ear, so rough gristled—
> He thought that he sung while he whistled![9]

Browning owns his bad ear, pushing his verse so that sound threatens to overwhelm sense, veering into the realm of the absurd in a way that resonates with the nonsense poetry of Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll, and other authors associated with writing for children.

Browning's self-deprecating poem equating his own poetry with whistling underscores how the poets and literary critics of his time were deeply concerned with the interplay between sound patterning and sense. Gerard Manley Hopkins was another such critic, also known for his inventive attention to poetic sounds, as well as his medievalism. Hopkins was not an admirer of Browning's work; he wrote that Browning made his characters talk "with the air and spirit of a man bouncing up from the table with his mouth full of bread and cheese and saying he meant to stand no blasted nonsense."[10] Despite this denunciation, both poets were similarly interested in the "mouthability" of poetry, how the physical properties of language could communicate a truth that lay beyond the meaning of the words.[11] Hopkins drew from John Duns Scotus's notion of *haecceitas* or "thisness" to articulate a theory of "inscape" (the innate or essential quality of a thing) and "instress" (the perceptible quality

9. Robert Browning, *Robert Browning's Poetical Works: Pacchiarotto and how he worked in distemper, with other poems* (London: Smith, Elder, 1889), 26.

10. Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon*, ed. C. C. Abbott (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 74–75.

11. In his examination of the role of rhythm in Victorian prosody, Michael D. Hurley makes a similar point about the overarching agreement about the importance of poetic sounds among Victorian poets, despite their differences in execution. See Michael D. Hurley, "Rhythm," in Bevis, *Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry*, 31. Hurley borrows the term "mouthability" from Christopher Ricks at 22.

of a thing), which informed his particular mode of "sprung rhythm."[12] In brief, Hopkins's sprung rhythm relished the aural texture of language, using instress as a means of getting at inscape.[13] Hopkins's aural fluidity and Browning's halting roughness thus offer very different ways of conveying meaning through the noise of language.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, several decades after Browning and Hopkins were at their most prolific, the Victorian author and craftsman William Morris, who was influential in the emergence of the Arts and Crafts Movement in England, founded his Kelmscott Press, which drew on medieval literary and textual aesthetics in its book publication. One such text, *A Dream of John Ball*, written by Morris himself, takes the form of a dream vision in which a Dreamer falls asleep and finds himself among the peasant rebels in the town of Kent as they plan the revolt of 1381. In order to pay for his food and lodging among the men of Kent, the Dreamer makes himself known as a traveling poet. When the time comes for him to offer entertainment, he explains, "the words seemed to quicken and grow, so that I knew not the sound of my own voice, and they ran almost into rhyme and measure as I told it."[14] The men in the audience around him begin their own song in response, with voices that the narrator describes as "strong and rough, but not unmusical."[15] Morris's reverence for such rough song, which seems to emerge from the singer's body automatically without the influence of the mind, is consistent with his overall ethos of what we might call an aesthetic socialism.[16] This code elevated the pleasure of craftsmanship as an expression of moral truth, an idea that had emerged from the Pre-Raphaelite medievalism of thinkers such as John Ruskin.[17] Recalling

12. Scholars have debated the degree to which Scotus's *haecceitas* corresponds more closely with Hopkins's notion of "inscape" or "pitch." For more on Scotus's influence on Hopkins, especially with respect to a "metaphysics of individuation," see Thomas Doyle, S.J., "'What I Do Is Me': Scotist Elements in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins," *Hopkins Quarterly* 20 (1993): 3.

13. See James Wimsatt, *Hopkins's Poetics of Speech Sound: Sprung Rhythm, Lettering, Inscape* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006). Wimsatt proposes that Hopkins's theories of poetic language shifted from prioritizing "onomatopoetic evocation of lexical meanings" to "a sensory and emotional inscape, particularly aided by verse's repetitions of the speech-sound figures" (111). In this book, his analysis emphasizes the extent to which ancient Greek and Latin thought influenced Hopkins's poetics. There may indeed be more to say regarding the influences of vernacular English poetry of the Middle Ages on Hopkins's "poetics of speech sound."

14. William Morris, *A Dream of John Ball* (London: Electric Book Company, 2001), 21.

15. Morris, *A Dream of John Ball*, 21.

16. For a fuller discussion of this conjunction of aesthetics and socialism in *A Dream of John Ball*, see Lears, "On Bells and Rebellion."

17. For a discussion of Morris's medievalism and its debt to Ruskin, see Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 62–65.

the structures of feeling I have outlined here, perhaps especially Langland's ambivalent embrace of *lollares* and lolling, Morris's reverence for pleasure was at least in part about locating the mutual interdependence of labor and idleness. Indeed, at the end of the *Dream of John Ball*, as the Dreamer awakes, he informs us: "[I] dressed and got ready for my day's 'work' as I call it, but which many a man besides John Ruskin (though not many in his position) would call 'play.'"[18]

The interplay between sound and sense that we see in early modernist and Victorian writing is taken to further extremes in high-modernist experimentation with new narrative and poetic forms, especially the stream of consciousness and bizarre verbal bricolage of authors like James Joyce. This book's epigraphs, taken from James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*, all amplify the echoes of medieval thought in high-modernist literary theory and practice. I will conclude by tracing connections among some of these epigraphs in order to amplify the novel's treatment of noise as an extrasemantic cognitive and emotional space. For Joyce, as for many of the medieval authors I have examined in this book, this mode of cognition resists an authoritarian exchange of information and creates the possibility of sympathy and connection with others, and with the world at large. Here I will focus on the motif of a "shout" or "noise in the street," which recurs at many moments throughout the novel (more than I have indicated with my epigraphs). I hope that these gestures will offer a new way to contextualize Joyce's persistent emphasis on sounds throughout *Ulysses*, some of which appear in my other epigraphs: the hissing door-language that first appears in "Aeolus," for example, which so resonates with the *vox confusa* of Chaucer's *House of Fame*; or his Langlandian interest in the lolling aural texture of language as he describes the Quaker librarian at the Library of Congress as a lollard in "Scylla and Charybdis"; or in "Sirens," where Joyce's persistent emphasis on the "jingling" voices of the Misses Douce and Kennedy recalls the dangerously pleasing voice of Chaucer's Wife of Bath.[19] These examples begin to

18. Morris, *A Dream of John Ball*, 102–3.

19. See, for example, Joshua Epstein, *Sublime Noise: Musical Culture and the Modernist Writer* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014). Epstein shows how "noise and music—as mutually informing sonic presences and aesthetic and cultural categories—shape the writing of the early twentieth century" (xv). In his discussion of Joyce's *Ulysses*, Epstein uses the American avant-garde composer George Antheil's *Mr. Bloom and the Cyclops*, an "electric opera" based on the twelfth episode of *Ulysses*, to think about the rhetorical and ideological operations of music in the "Cyclops" chapter of *Ulysses*. He argues that Antheil's opera emphasizes the cacophonous aspects of music to parody the "high volume, and false holism of nationalist rhetoric," a means of critique that he draws from Joyce's oeuvre, and shows how Joyce's work is an "unleashing of noise, an effort to amplify the noises immanent in music and thereby to reveal music as a material, ideologically loaded artifact" (152).

suggest that Joyce, like many medieval thinkers also embedded in Catholic intellectual traditions, was keenly attuned to the extrasemantic aspects of language and voice.

In an oft-quoted exchange near the beginning of *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus and Mr. Deasy, the headmaster of the school where Stephen teaches, discuss theories of history. For Stephen, history is "the nightmare from which I am trying to awake." Deasy counters this, asserting that "all history moves toward one great goal, the manifestation of God." In response, Stephen listens and reflects on the sounds of the boys playing on the nearby ball field: "From the playfield the boys raised a shout. A whirring whistle: goal. What if the nightmare gave you a back kick?" He then responds to Deasy, saying "That is God . . . a shout in the street."[20] With this exchange, Joyce signals his modernist irreverence for the teleological theory of history that pervaded the Victorian era. He also signals what I have argued is a very medieval longing to find ultimate knowledge—whether defined as God or not—in the immanent and the everyday.[21]

Here, at the beginning of the novel, when Stephen is haunted by the death of his mother and alienated from others in the world around him, this perspective on a God that Stephen does not believe in offers an irreverent "back kick" to Deasy's concept of a distant, omnipotent, and authoritarian God, toward which the course of human history and the progression of knowledge is oriented. This "back kick" occurs again in "Oxen of the Sun," the chapter of *Ulysses* in which Joyce progresses through a history of English literary styles as he details his protagonist's visit to a maternity hospital and

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By stressing Joyce's medievalist orientation toward the noise of language, I hope to emphasize how Joyce understood noise to lend itself not only to parodying the "hot air" of nationalist rhetoric, but also as a more positive material and somatic form of ultimate knowledge.

20. James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 28.

21. Joyce's emphasis on the voices of children here hearkens back to the crucial turning point in Augustine's spiritual autobiography, in which he hears the voice of God as a child "in a singing tune" telling him to "take up and read, take up and read." See Augustine, *Confessions*, 1:464–65; translations are Watts's. This motif also anticipates later twentieth-century writing, such as some of the last reflections of Vladimir Nabokov's Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*. As he drives away from the scene of murdering Clare Quilty, Humbert recalls stopping to listen: "Reader! What I heard was but the melody of children at play, nothing by that, and so limpid was the air that within this vapor of blended voices, majestic and minute, remote and magically near, frank and divinely enigmatic—one could hear them now and then, as if released, an almost articulate spurt of vivid laughter, or the crack of a bat, or the clatter of a toy wagon, but it was all really too far for the eye to distinguish any movement in the lightly etched streets. I stood listening to that musical vibration from my lofty slope, to those flashes of separate cries with a kind of demure murmur for background, and then I knew that the hopelessly poignant thing was not Lolita's absence from my side, but the absence of her voice from that concord." See Nabokov, *Lolita* (New York: Vintage International, 1997), 308.

the jovial conversations of the medical students there. "A black crack of noise in the street" emerges—or, more precisely, "bawl[s] back"—as a vernacular response to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Latinate prose styles detailing the conversations of the medical students.[22]

In Joyce's hallucinatory chapter "Circe," Stephen and Leopold Bloom wander the streets of Dublin's red-light district encountering dreamlike manifestations of their fears and desires. Here, noise at first annoys Stephen. As he reflects on musical cosmology, he hears a gramophone playing "The Holy City," a late nineteenth-century hymn in which a narrator has a dream vision of children singing, reminding him of angels. In response to this hymn—an echo of the boys' shouts, earlier—Stephen declares, "Damn that fellow's noise in the street. Self which it itself was ineluctably preconditioned to become. *Ecco*!"[23] At this later point in the novel, Stephen's perception of noise is conventional: it is unwanted sound, linked to the sanctimony of an unknown neighbor. Yet, as his thoughts turn back inward, Stephen's free association begins to reconcile, on his own terms, with the play of sounds around him. The injunction "*Ecco*," Italian for "here" and a play on "ecce," the Latin command to "behold" (also used in scholastic argument to mean "it has been definitively stated") implies an aurality that invites attention to the jumbled soundscape of cries, laughing, whispers, and music around him. Nearer the close of the chapter, Stephen is friends with this noise, responding to a discord of song with "Hark! Our friend noise in the street."[24] "Hark," the vernacular English expression for listening, replaces "ecco," the Latinate expression (adapted though it is) for beholding. Stephen embraces the immersion in sound that this dreamlike experience affords him.

Indeed, it is ultimately in an extrasemantic experience of sound that Stephen finds a fleeting companionship with Leopold Bloom, the novel's other protagonist. In "Ithaca," As Bloom brings Stephen home to sober up, Stephen resists Bloom's gestures of care. Yet his sense of alienation is momentarily suspended as the two discuss the languages of their heritage—Old Irish and Hebrew—with fragments of poetry they only dimly recall or understand. Despite their elementary knowledge of these languages, the two discuss "points of contact . . . between these languages and between the peoples who spoke them," beginning with "the presence of guttural sounds [and] diacritic aspirations" they share.[25] In this way, Joyce's high-modernist novel develops

22. Joyce, *Ulysses*, 323.
23. Joyce, *Ulysses*, 412.
24. Joyce, *Ulysses*, 468.
25. Joyce, *Ulysses*, 564.

what I have argued is a very medieval interest in reorientation toward the extrasemantic properties of language and in finding joy, and with it meaning, in its sounds, textures, shapes—and noise. Joyce's modernist style relies on such attunement, creating an echo (an *ecco*?)-chamber of soundplay that invites an immersion in the material elements of language.

Joyce's sprawling final novel, *Finnegans Wake*, is an extended testament to this notion. Here Joyce shows, for example, the influence of the Anglo-Irish style of Hisperic Latin, an early Latinate form whose influence is felt in the sounds of certain Old English poetry, for example, the *Exeter Book*'s "Rhyming Poem."[26] Hisperic Latin, tellingly dubbed by one early twentieth-century medievalist as a "luxuriant culture-fungus of decay," was known for its rhetorical ornamentation and learned vocabulary influenced by languages that were largely unknown to the monks who composed it.[27] It is tempting to suggest that part of the appeal of such macaronic composition was the sound of the language rather than the meaning of the words.[28] The absurdist use of language associated with Hisperic Latin proved an irresistible influence to Joyce, known as he was for his virtuosic, but often difficult and nonsensical, play with language. In an early portion of *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce incorporates quotes from the poem *Altus Prosator* (First sower), a hymn about the creation of the world, into a passage of his own Latin. While Joyce's Latin mimics medieval religious composition in style and lexicon, its content is nonsensically profane. It narrates the First Sower's initial excretion into his own hand ("in manum suum evacuavit"), which Joyce glosses with the aside in English "(highly prosy, crap in his hand, sorry!)." He then describes how the excretions are placed into a vessel and joyfully and fluidly mixed with the incantations of twin monks ("sub invocation fratrorum geminorum . . . laete ac melliflue minxit") to produce indelible ink.[29] The scatological associations of incantation in this section recall the reaction of Chaucer's Host to The Tale of Sir Thopas, the aborted first poem offered by Chaucer-the-pilgrim. Interrupting Chaucer's I-persona midpoem, the Host excoriates Chaucer with the

26. James W. Earl, "Hisperic Style in the Old English 'Rhyming Poem,'" *PMLA* 102, no. 2 (1987): 187–96.

27. Eóin MacNiell, "Beginnings of Latin Culture in Ireland," *Studies* 20 (1931): 39–48. See also Michael Herren's reconsideration of this pejorative phrase in "Hisperic Latin: 'Luxuriant Culture-Fungus of Decay,'" *Traditio* 30 (1974): 411–19.

28. Indeed, such texts invite further investigation on the interplay between sound and sense in the early medieval literature *before* the focus of this project. For some discussion on the role of soundplay in Old English poetry, see Adin E. Lears, "Soð and Sense: Language Problems and Affective Solutions in Anglo-Saxon Treatments of the Guthlac Legend," *Viator* 44, no. 3 (2013): 79–83.

29. James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 185.

assertion that "[his] drasty rymyng is nat worth a toord!" (VII. 930). Both Joyce and Chaucer accentuate a link between the aural and somatic aspects of language and excremental waste. Like Chaucer, moreover, Joyce suggests that such waste is the very stuff of literary creation.

For Umberto Eco (whose name is merely a happy coincidence here), Joyce's medievalism lay in his understanding of the world as an ordered universe with "an unlimited chain of relations between creatures and events"; the task of the artist was to represent this cosmic web. As Eco notes, this perspective inflected Joyce's poetics, which create and multiply meaning in a process Eco describes in terms of reflection: "Any person or event is a cypher which refers to another part of the book. This generates the grid of allusions in *Ulysses* and the system of puns in *Finnegans Wake*. Every word embodies every other because language is a self-reflecting world. . . . If you take away the transcendent God from the symbolic world of the Middle Ages, you have the world of Joyce."[30] This is the "chaosmos" of the title: a tangled web of impression and association that amplifies fullness of meaning. I suggest that this web of reflection might also be described in terms of echo and its resulting indeterminate noise of meaning. Indeed, at least one Joyce scholar has suggested as much, noting that the echo is a fitting way to frame the creative landscape of *Finnegans Wake*: "a resonant novel full of reverberations where every element has or is an echo, where everything is a response to something and even, at overwhelming moments, to everything else."[31]

As his eyesight increasingly failed toward the end of his life, Joyce seems acutely aware of the very medieval idea that the sounds of language in the fallen world may overtake what they signify. Shortly after beginning *Finnegans Wake* in the middle of a sentence, Joyce places us in a familiar cosmological view:

> The fall (bababadalgharaghtakamminarronnkonnbronntonner-ronntuonn thunntrovarrhounawnskawntoohoohoordenenthurnuk!) of a once wall-strait oldparr is retaled early in bed and later on life down through all christian minstrelsy.[32]

Recalling medieval conceptions of the Fall as the crucial moment when language came to exist in time and the body, an echo of the pure *logos*, Joyce's

30. Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Chaosmos: The Middle Ages of James Joyce* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 7.

31. Finn Fordham, "Mapping Echoland," *Joyce Studies Annual* 11 (2000): 167.

32. Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 3.

fall initiates a loud noise, which builds upon itself, with many syllables echoing their predecessors, from "ba-ba-ba" to "ronn-konn-bronn" to "den-en" until the noise seems to cease with "thurnuk!" But does the noise actually cease? Like the medieval works I examine, *Finnegans Wake* invites us to experience how the distance or echo between the sounded sign and the idea itself can be a valuable space for poetic play. Indeed, the novel insists that we must listen to these noises. As we hear early in the text (and repeated, in various forms, over the course of the novel): "Hush! Caution! Echoland!"[33] A joy in the noise of language reverberates backward and forward in time, from a world of echo to an echoland.

In its broadest sense, *World of Echo* has shown how medieval thinkers embraced a reorientation toward the extrasemantic aspects of language felt in and through the body. In doing so, they sought to understand and unite with the radical alterity of God. But they also sought to bridge the gap between themselves and others—humans and more—in the world around them. From a perspective neither religious nor entirely secularly humanistic, Amy Hollywood has written of "a transcendence that occurs between people or between people and the world around them, and yet is irreducible to the various parties in the relationship, perhaps even to the relationship itself."[34] This book examines how authors and poets in the Middle Ages attuned themselves to this transcendence and worked to communicate across it. Hollywood calls for a place for joy in both thought and critique:

> Those of us living in privilege—and those living, often barely, without it—are unable to look away, unable to act, unable, in the fullest sense of the word, to live. Yet the energy for efficacious action comes not solely through melancholy, but also through joy, through a love of the world that, in love, demands change. . . . This takes work, work on ourselves and work on the world, an unalienated labor in and through which we become who we are. Not suffering or joy, for we can't have the one without the other; we can't live well—we can't *live*—on sorrow and anger and rage alone.[35]

Thus, what I have argued for, in brief, is the sympathetic and unifying power of a literary study that embraces joy in language. Such joy is not entirely separable from pain or anguish—Rolle's lovesickness, Kempe's tears, and

33. Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 13.
34. Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia*, 5.
35. Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia*, 64.

Langland's Conscience crying after grace call attention to this. But the works I examine show how a joy in the sounds and feelings of language, coupled with the labor that transforms this experience into interpretation, can be a way of knowing and expressing a larger truth that we (like many medieval thinkers) might call love.

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